



THE FIVE DYNASTIES

Later imperial China can be said to begin in the half-century of deep changes that occurred between the fall of the Tang dynasty and the subsequent founding of the Song, two of imperial China's longest and most important dynastic periods. Those changes were hastened by the fragmentation and turbulence that marked this period of political disorder and military conflict. One consequence was that in the age which followed, North China became the object of Inner Asian military expansion. Simultaneously, while resisting that expansion, the Song dynasty gave new shape to the course of Chinese civilization. Despite political disorder and military involvement, the tenth century was an age rich in cultural development. Here the political outlines of the Five Dynasties and the concurrent Ten States are briefly summarized. Finally, as prelude to the profound interaction of China and Inner Asia in the centuries that followed, background information on Inner Asia is introduced.

I. LATER IMPERIAL CHINA'S PLACE IN HISTORY

Imperial China was more than a thousand years old when the great Tang dynasty came to its end in the year 907 of our Common Era (C.E.). Chinese high civilization was much older; its documented history as a literate civilization extends back a thousand years before its "imperial" history began in the third century before our Common Era (B.C.E.). That was when the Qin dynasty's "First Emperor," or Shihuangdi, as he insisted on being called, unified all the Chinese states in 221 B.C.E. and launched the new phase in history that we call imperial China.

Throughout the eleven centuries of early imperial China prior to our beginning point in this volume, the imperial Chinese state acquired its characteristic features. The brief Qin dynasty and its successor, the Han (206 B.C.E.—220 C.E.), accomplished the basic steps. Some of early imperial China's social and political features are rare in the histories of early peoples: all political power

was highly centralized; its government was a bureaucracy of highly literate administrators who were men selected in principle for their individual qualifications of learning and ability; and its imperial institution, while linked to no church or organized religion, yet claimed that its right to rule was bestowed by heaven's mandate—however that might be interpreted. At the very least, it was taken to mean that the mandate to rule had to be earned, and would be withdrawn when the legitimate rulers showed that, by the standard of serving the “popular good,” they were no longer worthy of it. Dynasties, meaning the succession of rulers directly descended from a founding emperor, rose and fell through military action, but the imperial state was a civil government in which, nominally at least, the civil virtues were held to be superior to the military. There was no hereditary military aristocracy in the strict sense of the word, nor even a civil aristocracy. Inherited titles and privileges were, to be sure, more numerous in those earlier centuries, but at no time did they entail fiefs with hereditary political rights. In practice, imperial China was from the beginning largely governed by men (other than the successor emperors themselves) who gained their positions by their individual qualities, not by inheritance. They were drawn from a society that had no legally established class distinctions. Those principles, and the initial experience in practicing them, were clearly established under the radical Qin dynasty in the late third century B.C.E. China's long subsequent experience in working out ways to maintain and enlarge in practice the basic social conditions which they imply gives its history special interest in the comparative study of human civilizations.

Following the Han dynasty, and after a further century of weak governing, a long period of division into simultaneous Northern and Southern Dynasties (317–589) led at last to a new unification. That verified Chinese expectations that their cultural realm constituted one society that should have one ruler. Again, a brief but powerful dynasty like the third-century B.C.E. Qin, in this case the Sui (581–618), accomplished the military reunification, to be followed by the long and glorious flowering of Chinese civilization under the Tang dynasty (618–907).

The year 900 C.E. makes a meaningful beginning point for this volume devoted to the later centuries of China's imperial rule. True, the idea that there could be a “Common Era” *not* based on the Chinese calendar is completely foreign to traditional Chinese civilization; China adopted that idea only in the twentieth century, when the term *gongyuan*, meaning something essentially like “common era,” slowly came into widespread use, and even today has not completely superseded the traditional Chinese dating system. In recent decades many historians have come to use this Western, or “Common Era,” dating for events in Chinese history, so we may do the same here, even though at that time, in the minds of the Chinese and their neighbors in East and Inner Asia, the year that closely matches 900, (actually, it began on February 4, 900, and ended on January 22, 901) was thought of as the third year of the Guanghua reign period of the late Tang dynasty emperor Zhaozong; that year did not begin a century or precisely correspond to any recog-

nized turning point in history. Nevertheless, the year 900 loosely corresponds to a genuine turning point, marked by the end of the Tang dynasty (formally dated to the year 907). In the last decades of the ninth century C.E. and the first decades of the tenth, we clearly see the beginnings of far-reaching changes that have great significance for defining the subsequent age in Chinese as well as Inner Asian history. It is for this reason that I have chosen the year 900 as our arbitrary beginning point.

The Sui and Tang dynasties, coming to power in the sixth and seventh centuries, faced the problem of consolidating the Chinese state after almost three centuries of north-south division, caused by the incursions of Inner Asian peoples long in contact with the Chinese culture area. When the Sui and then the Tang established their dynasties, they were able to fend off those invasions, but China's interaction with non-Chinese peoples on all of its land borders continued. Other Inner Asian peoples again came to play crucial roles in the life of China after 900, if in a new way. The interplay of China and Inner Asia is a consistent element in the development of both, extending far back into the prehistoric millennia; that is abundantly and ever more clearly revealed by recent systematic archaeological explorations. The Inner Asian peoples occupied regions lying just north of the Chinese cultural area, defined by an ecological boundary that separated the conditions of sedentary farming life of the Chinese people from the harsher conditions farther north and northwest, under which hunting and herding were basic to people's livelihood. In Tang and later times those northern peoples were predominantly “Turkic,” insofar as we can determine from our knowledge of the languages their descendants spoke, but by the same measure, some also were Aryan peoples whose languages were related to Persian, and some spoke languages with affinities for present-day Tibetan; there probably were others of still different linguistic and cultural identities.

The sedentary Chinese also interacted with non-Chinese (in present-day usage, non-Han) peoples on its other land frontiers in the south, southwest, and southeast. Those non-Chinese were mostly sedentary farming peoples who, like the Chinese, practiced intensive village-based agriculture. The long centuries of interaction with them, and Chinese infiltration into their lands, did not involve crossing any ecological barriers, and went on continuously, more or less unnoticed by writers of history.

It was the martial tribal peoples of Inner Asia, who developed military and organizational skills based on their lives as hunters and herders, who alone among all of China's neighbors had the power to threaten the existence of the Chinese state. They were always potential raiders, invaders, conquerors, and rulers. Both the Sui and the Tang ruling houses arose in the northwest border zone, having intermarried with Turkic princely families and used warrior skills developed in that interaction to found their dynasties. Through the more than three centuries of Sui and Tang, China remained strongly oriented toward its northern and northwestern frontier. It extended control and influence deep into Inner Asia, and benefited from the cultural and commercial contacts with more distant Central Asia and regions beyond, to India, Persia,

and western Asia. It was the age when the ancient Silk Roads came to their greatest importance, connecting the Tang capital to what the Chinese called the Western Regions, to the homeland of Buddhism (which had been present in China from Han times onward), and to the religious and cultural traditions still farther west—Zoroastrian, Manichaean, Islamic, Jewish, Nestorian Christian, among others that came into Tang China. There they established communities of their co-believers. Those immigrant peoples helped to mediate between eastern and western Asia in this most cosmopolitan period of China's 2,000-year-long imperial era. While Chinese interests in Inner Asia led to an extension of China's military and political control there, Chinese population was not significantly extended into Inner Asia at that time. An ecological boundary separated China Proper and the Inner Asian territories, whose grasslands, deserts, and oases did not attract Chinese farmers. Throughout the Tang period's westward extension of Chinese interest and influence, the Chinese presence in Inner Asia was limited to military garrisons and small merchant communities in the oases along the nearer Silk Road routes.

The Tang was, however, a period during which the Chinese people greatly extended the areas of their demographic dominance by migration to the south, where no such ecological barriers existed. Increased numbers of Chinese filled out the Yangzi River drainage basin of Central China and further south, into the Southeast China coastal regions as far as present-day Guangdong (Canton) and Vietnam. The centuries-long process of Chinese southward migration seldom involved large-scale military confrontation, even though it was not always peaceable.

Armed conflict, in contrast, was a constant feature on the northern borders with Inner Asia, where the non-Chinese peoples possessed the means to sorely test Chinese military capacities. Their striking force enabled the northern peoples to take active parts in Tang China's internal power struggles: they supplied the Tang government, or its domestic opponents, with cavalry forces in return for political rewards. Inner Asian military power became a component of Tang internal politics, of increasing importance from the mid-eighth century onward. When the later Tang emperors chose to strengthen their rule by granting military governorships both in the provinces and along the northern borders, these often went to the non-Chinese tribal leaders. During the rebellion of Huang Chao that grew out of widespread bandit operations in the 870s, the capital was sacked and half the provinces of China, as far south as Guangdong, were ravaged by Huang Chao's roaming armies. That massive rebellion was finally suppressed in 884 with the aid of a chieftain of the Shatuo Turks. The Shatuo were one of several Turkic nations with whom the Tang court had been involved. This man bore the Chinese name Li Keyong. His reward for intervening with the might of Turkic cavalry was the grant of a base in northern Shanxi, which he turned into a bastion of Turkic military power, using it to play a major role in the struggles among regional warlords to impose control over the Tang imperial court. Forced to grant local authority to the regional military leaders, whether Chinese or Turkic, including authority for civil governing and tax collection, in return for unreliable

professions of loyalty, the later Tang emperors never regained full control over their country. The character of governing was changed. Among those holders of real power who were Chinese (as most were), they had come from the defeated forces of Huang Chao or from other bandit uprisings. The great families of the Tang civil and bureaucratic elite played almost no part in the final struggles of the Tang to survive. As a sector of elite society, they had been largely nullified if not eliminated.

The later Tang emperors were thus little more than pawns of contesting military leaders. One such leader, a Chinese named Zhu Wen, a former captain in Huang Chao's rebel armies, seized the capital in 901. Then in 905 he killed the emperor and most of the Tang imperial family and placed a teenage imperial prince on the throne as his puppet. Finally, in 907 he abandoned all pretenses and declared himself the founding emperor of a new dynasty. In 908 he killed the deposed last Tang emperor, a boy of sixteen. That cycle of violence began the Liang (Later Liang), the first of the Five Dynasties. The fall of the Tang dynasty is one of the more obvious reasons for taking the year 900, more precisely 907, to mark the beginning of the long period that in this volume is called later imperial China.

The half-century-long Five Dynasties period, from the Later Liang in 907 to the founding of the Song dynasty in 960, appears on the surface to have been an age of utter chaos, violence, and political disorder. None of the Five Dynasties, based in North China, was able to reunify China; all coexisted with province-size Chinese states in Central and South China. Three of the five were established by non-Chinese leaders who had become part of the Chinese military and political scene. Despite that surface appearance of unending disorder, the reality underlying this half-century is one of deep and transforming change. A new structure of state power emerged, and a new relationship of military power to civil administrative authority took shape in reaction against the long-accumulated political weaknesses of the late Tang. In civil society, the centuries-long dominance of the established "great families" within officialdom and in the society of their home localities was utterly broken, to be replaced by a new class of civil bureaucrats who used office to gain social status, not the other way around. In economic spheres, the "commercial revolution" of late Tang times continued to alter patterns of trade and economic behavior throughout society, and to provide the state with the means to a strengthened fiscal base.

Also starting in the late Tang, a new understanding of what should constitute the Confucian ethical basis of governing and of social life was forcefully demanded by a few thinkers and statesmen.¹ That became a full-scale movement in Confucian thought in early Northern Song times, some 200 years later, when it produced the flowering of philosophical debate and speculation that we call Neo-Confucianism. That reorientation of the ancient Confucian thought system dominated Chinese civilization for a millennium. It complemented and reinforced other changes in the social development of post-Tang China. These included a spread of learning aided by the Tang invention of printing from engraved wooden blocks, a technology that reached great

heights from the Five Dynasties period onward, with profound social consequences, and one that invites comparison with the appearance of printing technology in fifteenth-century Europe. Amidst those profound changes, the flamboyant, cosmopolitan, outward-looking, and expansive age of Sui and Tang was succeeded by a markedly different cultural tone and outlook in the Song dynasty, including both the earlier Northern Song phase (960–1126) and the Southern Song continuation of that long dynasty (to 1279). The implications of that cultural change, leading to the “new culture of Song” that followed, will be an important focus of the chapters to come.

There also are strong elements of continuity through the transition from Tang to Song. I have noted that one important element of continuity from the late Tang into the next several centuries is China’s involvement with Inner Asia. Just as the Tang was being brutally terminated, a rival dynasty was being created on China’s northern borders, the Liao dynasty, formed by the Khitan tribal nation,² taking Tang China’s “universal” imperial system as its political model. By acquiring the means to play a direct role in the politics of the Five Dynasties, the Khitan nation’s Liao state would acquire control over a strategic border zone within China Proper; that foothold would gain for it an integral place in the functioning of the Chinese state. The Liao established the precedent for a succession of what are called the “conquest dynasties,” first the Liao, then the Tangut Xi Xia, and then the Jurchen Jin, each of which extended alien control further into North China. The Mongols’ Yuan dynasty then completed the absorption of the entire Chinese culture realm into their world empire in the thirteenth century. There was a vigorous resurgence of native rule under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), to be followed by the final alien dynasty in Chinese later imperial history, the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911).

That brief outline shows how deeply the history of this long period from 900 to 1800 is intertwined with the histories of Inner Asian peoples, in a story that will occupy much of this volume. The era of the Five Dynasties thus brings our attention to the deep changes brought about by the manner in which the Tang dynasty declined and lost the capacity to rule. It leads us to consider the changing character of Chinese civilization that emerged thereafter, and it introduces the element of a new level of Chinese interaction with the non-Chinese tribal nations of Inner Asia.

II. THE COURSE OF FIVE DYNASTIES HISTORY

In traditional Chinese historical writing this period is known as the “Five Dynasties and Ten States,” a catchall designation for what has always been seen as a confused and troubled age. Each of the Five Dynasties, in quick succession, occupied most of northern China; nine of the Ten States³ were located in Central and southern China. The difference between a “dynasty” (*chao* or *chaodai*) and a “state” (*guo*) in this usage reflects traditional Chinese views about the status and legitimacy of governments. Dynasties were held to have possessed the Mandate of Heaven (*Tian ming*), and from that were

entitled to a place in the succession of legitimate dynasties. The mere states also were recognized as polities, whether acknowledged by contemporary dynasties or not, openly subservient to them or not, but were not retroactively confirmed in their claims of legitimacy by deciding that they indeed had held the Mandate to rule over all of China. By implication, that claim always was denied to all but one of the claimants then on the scene. Those decisions were verified by statesmen and historians working under a later dynasty; both the facts of history and political interests had to be carefully considered and plausible judgment reached. This period in Chinese imperial history provides illustrations of all the possible variants in the categories of dynasties and states.

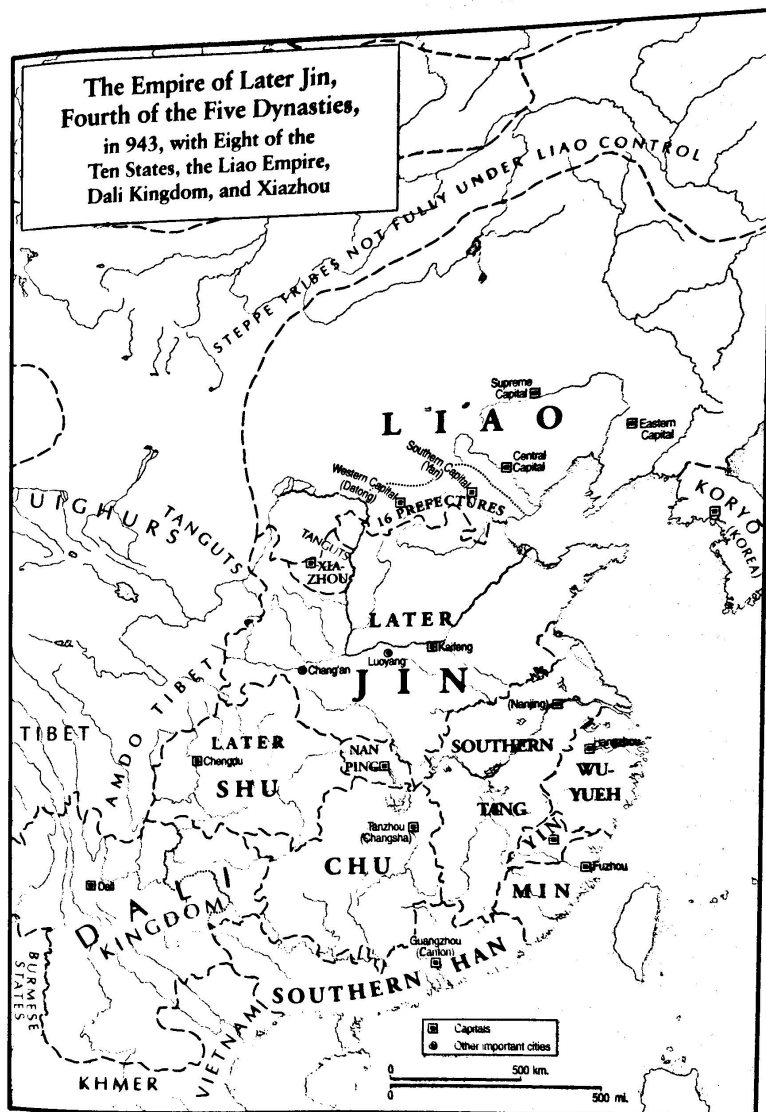
At the time, however, it was not certain that any of the Five Dynasties would receive that verification either from contemporaries or from the historians. The first official history of the period, the *Five Dynasties History* (*Wudai shi*) was compiled in the 960s and 970s by a scholar-official who served at the court of the first Song emperor.⁴ A participant in the history whose compilation he directed, he had the interests of the new Song dynasty in mind when he determined that the five northern states should be confirmed as “dynasties,” thereby reinforcing the Song dynasty’s claim to legitimacy through transmission of the Mandate all the way from the Tang. If the dynasty that reunified the Chinese state had appeared among the Ten States in the south, another chain of transmission from the Tang would have been devised, and it would have included a different set of intermediary “dynasties.”

Apart from historians’ concern for legitimacy through direct transmission of the Mandate, there are other reasons for looking upon the northern sequence of states as the logical bearers of legitimacy. However brief and unstable, one after another the Five Dynasties controlled all or most of the old heartland of Chinese civilization. Their territory was considerably larger than that of any of the Ten States, making it more probable that one of them might go on to conquer or coerce the remainder of the realm, and thereby meet a crucial demand for making a claim to be the new bearer of the Mandate. The ancient idea of a heavenly or cosmic mandate to rule was the only theoretical verification of legitimacy that traditional Chinese political thinkers and dynastic founders ever agreed upon. To claim that validating mandate demanded more than the power to conquer or coerce. A new aspirant to legitimate rule, besides displaying the raw military power sufficient to suppress all opposition, and thereby to unify the realm, also had to make plausible his claim that heaven had transferred the Mandate to himself and his lineage (his dynasty), and that he had met convincingly the ritual requirements of universal rulership. He had to be successful in commanding the force, to whatever degree was necessary to unify the realm; but he also had to show that he was morally upright, hence in harmony with the moral universe. To be accepted as morally upright meant that the dynastic founder was obliged to acknowledge tradition and conform to venerated patterns. In other words, a dynastic founder needed to show that he both was “correct” (*zheng*) and could achieve “control” (*tong*). Whatever his real character, he had to project an image.

The founders of these Five Dynasties scarcely met the criteria. First, though each possessed enough military power to seize the capital and overawe resistance nearer at hand in North China, none of them was able to "unify the realm"; the general expectation that China would be reunified lent force to their pretensions, yet the coexistence of other states in Central and South China continued to divide the realm, denying them that necessary element of legitimacy. Second, although they all engaged in elaborate ritual performances, the "correctness" of their imperial claims might be less than obvious to observers. In particular, the brutal behavior of Zhu Wen, the first in a rapid succession of founding dynasts, the usurper who killed off the Tang imperial family and stole their throne, made many thoughtful persons of the time wish to exclude his Later Liang dynasty from the successive bearers of the Mandate. His courtesy name Zhu Quanzhong, "Zhu of perfect loyalty," made a mockery of his behavior, and the violence which he inflicted on underlings and on loyal adherents of the Tang dynasty made him a hated figure. The compiler of the official *Five Dynasties History* had to swallow hard to include him among the bearers of the Mandate. The thoughtful historians' dilemma was real. Later historians, seeking some higher reasoning to maintain the ideal of legitimacy, blamed Zhu's behavior on the extraordinary times.

One can, then, readily see why the entire period from 907 to 960 has been something of an embarrassment to traditional historians: many of the principal actors were morally tarnished or otherwise found lacking. The founders of the three middle dynasties among the five were non-Chinese Shatuo Turks, military leaders who had at one time been allies of the Tang in the role of regional military governors on the northern borders. Some Chinese were disquieted by their alien origins, even though those Shatuo leaders were virtually indistinguishable from their Chinese rivals, and were superior to some of them. In a period of ruthlessly self-serving political behavior, a man like Zhu Wen's mortal enemy Li Keyong, the Prince of Jin (a title conferred in 895 by the Tang court as a reward for his military assistance) and regional warlord of the Shanxi region, was politically ambitious and adept at plotting. He nevertheless stands out as an exemplar of consistent loyalty to his overlords, the Tang dynasty emperors, in an age when loyalty was not much in evidence. It is a noteworthy feature of the underlying Chinese political theory that non-Chinese were not excluded from the possibility of receiving the Mandate of Heaven and thereby being recognized as legitimate rulers over China.

Even though traditional historians have found the Five Dynasties an embarrassment, the period is important to our understanding of the Song dynasty which followed, and to the growth of Chinese civilization. The political narrative is not set forth in detail here, but is encapsulated in the remainder of this section. Map 1 shows the boundaries of the constituent dynasties and states at one point within the period.⁵ In the text that follows, regrettably, I can do little more than identify the dynasties and states in this half-century of history.



MAP 1

The Five Dynasties (907-959)

Later Liang (16 years, 907-923; 3 rulers). Founder, Zhu Wen (852?-912), also known as Zhu Quanzhong, Zhu Guochang. The Later Liang (the name Liang refers to the Henan region) held much of North China south to the Huai River, and in Hubei south to the Yangzi, but most of Hebei (where Zhu Wen strove unsuccessfully to impose his rule on local warlords), as well as Shanxi and Shaanxi, remained outside his control. Zhu Wen started his career in the 880s as a lieutenant of the rebel Huang Chao; subsequently he took over Huang Chao's best troops and set himself up as warlord of northern Henan, based at Kaifeng, from which he exerted control over the Tang capitals at Luoyang and Chang'an. During twenty years of military and political buildup, he had the Tang emperor Zhaozong murdered in 904 and placed Zhaozong's twelve-year-old son on the throne. In 907 he deposed, and in the following year murdered, that last Tang emperor, known as Ai Di, to proclaim himself emperor of the (Later) Liang. A powerful rivalry existed between the Later Liang on the one hand and, on the other, Li Keyong and his son, leaders of the Shatuo Turks based in Shanxi (see "Later Tang"). That rivalry continued after Zhu Wen was murdered in 912 by his son, who in turn was killed and succeeded by a younger son in 913. The latter reigned until 923 when he was killed by his own soldiers as the attacking Later Tang forces broke into the Liang capital.⁶

Later Tang (13 years, 923-936; 4 rulers). Nominal founder, Li Keyong (856-908), posthumously named "Martial Emperor." Actual founder, his son Li Cunxu (885-926). Capital, Luoyang. The Later Tang held all of North China, its realm considerably expanded to the north and the west beyond the Later Liang territories. Li Keyong was a Shatuo Turk on whom the grateful though always apprehensive Tang court, had bestowed the Tang imperial surname Li, and had further rewarded him with a military governorship in Shanxi, also known by the regional name Jin; in 895 his princely title was elevated to Prince of Jin. Li Keyong controlled the entire region of Shanxi where Shatuo military power was based. From that base he continued loyally (and ambitiously) to support the Tang court, through the once-great Tang dynasty's last decades, against Zhu Wen and other Chinese regional warlord enemies.

In 905, when Zhu Wen's dominant military position at the Tang court threatened Shatuo power, Li Keyong was reinforced by unsolicited aid from Abaoji, the Khitan leader; Abaoji led a vast Khitan cavalry force at full speed from the steppe to Datong in northern Shanxi, where he and Li became "sworn brothers" and military allies. After Li Keyong died in 908, his son Li Cunxu, heir to his regional titles and offices, carried on unremitting and generally successful warfare against the Later Liang, expanding his princely state of Jin. Although he subsequently became a debauched and inattentive governor, he remained militarily strong. In 923 he declared himself emperor of a "restored Tang" dynasty. Shortly thereafter he succeeded in destroying

the Liang, whereupon he moved his capital away from Kaifeng west to Luoyang, symbolically important to him because it had been the last Tang capital before 907. At Luoyang he attempted, in form and name at least, to restore the old Tang modes of governing, even its bad features; in relation to the developments of the age, that was an unproductive anachronism.

In 926, after an army officers' rebellion had led to the death of Li Cunxu (he was struck by an unaimed arrow during a riot), an adopted son of Li Keyong, Li Siyuan, succeeded to the throne. By that time the Shatuo leaders were estranged from the Khitans. Nevertheless, in 926 Li Siyuan sent an envoy to Abaoji's court to announce the death of Li Cunxu and his own succession. (See Chapter 2 for a translation of the envoy's report on his meeting with Abaoji.) Li Siyuan died after a reign of eight years, during which the recently conquered region of Shu revolted and declared independence (see "Later Shu" in the next section). His two successors had brief reigns, and the dynasty was terminated in 936 by the rebellion of Shi Jingtang, who, with Khitan aid, made himself the founding emperor of the Later Jin dynasty.

Later Jin (10 years, 936-946; 2 rulers). Founder, Shi Jingtang (892-942), a Shatuo Turk who was the son-in-law of Li Siyuan. Capital, Bian (Kaifeng). The Later Jin controlled the North China territory of the Later Tang dynasty except for the strategic Sixteen Prefectures. The most remarkable event of this founding emperor's reign was his cession to the Khitans of those Sixteen Prefectures which incorporated strategic northeastern border defenses, giving the Liao Empire unimpeded access to North China. The Later Jin was denigrated as a puppet regime. Humiliated by his dynasty's subordination to the Khitans, Shi Jingtang's nephew and successor defied their Khitan patrons, prompting the Khitan invasion of 946-47, which ended the Later Jin dynasty. That conquest was in itself a major turning point in Five Dynasties history. (See Chapter 3.)

Later Han (3 years, 947-950; 2 rulers). Founder, Liu Zhiyuan (893-948). Capital, Bian (Kaifeng). Later Han held the same territories as Later Jin. Liu Zhiyuan was a Shatuo Turk and military governor of Bingzhou, an old name for the area of northern and central Shanxi centered on the city of Taiyuan. This region had long been the stronghold of Turkic military power in North China. Liu Zhiyuan defied the Khitans during their invasion in 946-47. When the Khitan emperor (who had formally adopted the dynastic name Liao at Kaifeng in 947) died suddenly en route back to Liao territory later that year, it left a brief power vacuum in North China. Liu thereupon marched into Kaifeng and proclaimed his new Later Han dynasty. He died a year later, and was succeeded by a teenage son.

Later Zhou (9 years, 951-960; 3 rulers). Founder, Guo Wei (904-954). Capital, Bian (Kaifeng). A well-educated Chinese, the son of a local military leader under the Tang, Guo Wei himself sought a military career, and after 947 became a leading general and Assistant Military Commissioner at the

court of the Later Han founder, Liu Zhiyuan. Forced by a military coup to turn against the Later Han, Guo Wei declared himself emperor of the Great Zhou dynasty in Bian, shortly after New Year's Day 951. His rule was from the beginning vigorous and well organized. Early in life he had adopted Chai Rong (921-959), the young son of his wife's elder brother, eventually making the boy his heir. Upon Guo Wei's death from illness in 954 at age fifty, Chai Rong (now known as Guo Rong) ascended the throne as the second emperor. He reigned ably until his early death from an illness at age thirty-eight in 959. His seven-year-old son and heir was placed upon the throne, to reign until the following February, when the second emperor's most trusted senior military commander, Zhao Kuangyin, usurped the throne and declared himself the founder of the Great Song dynasty.

The "Ten States" of the Five Dynasties Period, as Traditionally Counted

Wu (35 years, 902-937; 4 rulers). Founder, Yang Xingmi. Capital, Guangling (Yangzhou), later moved to Jinling (Nanjing). Held major parts of (present-day) Jiangsu and Anhui, as well as adjoining portions of Jiangxi and Hubei. Yang became a military governor in 892 and was named Prince of Wu by the Tang court in 902. His state was taken over from within by the founder of the Southern Tang in 937.

Southern Tang (38 years, 937-975; 3 rulers). Founder, Li Bian (earlier known as Xu Zhigao). Capital, Xidu (Nanjing). Held (present-day) southern Anhui and southern Jiangsu, much of Jiangxi, Hunan, and eastern Hubei, and absorbed the states of Min (Fujian) and Chu (Hunan). Li Bian was reared as Yang Xingmi's stepson, usurped his stepfather's state of Wu, and, claiming to be a descendant of the Tang imperial family, "restored" his surname to Li. At that time he also changed the name of the Wu dynasty to Southern Tang. The second ruler, Li Jing (reigned 943-961), vigorously extended his state at the expense of neighboring Chu and Min, and built a splendid new capital on the site of present-day Nanjing. In 958, coming under pressure, he acknowledged the overlordship of the Later Zhou (of the Five Dynasties) and accepted its calendar. His son Li Yu, the last ruler ("Li Houzhu"), famed as a poet and promoter of the arts, continued to reign as a regional ruler after 961, nominally subordinate to the Song. Song armies invaded his domain in 975 and took him captive; he was poisoned on orders from the second Song emperor in 978.

Former Shu (18 years, 907-925; 2 rulers). Founder, Wang Jian. Capital, Chengdu. Held most of (present-day) Sichuan as well as portions of southern Gansu, Shaanxi, and western Hubei. Wang Jian was named military governor of western Sichuan in 891 by the Tang court; he expanded control to eastern Sichuan and beyond, and took the title of emperor in 907. Wang Jian died

in 918, to be succeeded by a profligate and incompetent son. When his state was invaded by the Later Tang in 925, he quickly surrendered.

Later Shu (30 years, 935-965; 2 rulers). Founder, Meng Zhixiang. Capital, Chengdu. Held same area as Former Shu. Meng Zhixiang commanded the invading army of the (Five Dynasties') Later Tang army in 925, and remained there as the military governor while plotting to proclaim himself emperor, which he did in 934. He died six months later and was succeeded by his son, Meng Chang, who ruled very ably for thirty years, until forced to surrender to invading Northern Song armies in 965.

Southern Han (54 years, 917-971; 4 rulers). Capital, Canton. Held (present-day) Guangdong and much of Guangxi. The nominal founder, posthumously so named, was Liu Yin, who had been named Regional Military Governor by the Tang court in 905, and Prince of Nanping in 909. On his death in 917, his brother Liu Yan claimed the more elevated title of emperor, first calling his state Great Yue, then Nan Han, or Southern Han (919). Liu Yan reigned for twenty-five years, until 943, to be followed by his son and two grandsons, until the last was forced to submit to the Song in 971.

Chu (24 years, 927-951; 6 rulers). Founder, Ma Yin, followed by five sons in succession. Capital, Changsha. Held (present-day) Hunan and northeastern Guangxi. Ma Yin was named regional military governor in 896, and Prince of Chu in 907. He was confirmed as Prince of the State of Chu in 927 by the Later Tang of the Five Dynasties. When quarrels among members of the Ma family gave rise to disorder, the ruler sought assistance from the neighboring Southern Tang, whose armies invaded, moved the ruling family to the Southern Tang capital (Nanjing), and absorbed the state.

Wu-Yue (71 years, 907-978; 5 rulers). Founder, Qian Liu. Capital, Xifu (Hangzhou). Held (present-day) Zhejiang and a portion of southern Jiangsu. The Qian family provided regional military leaders from 887 onward. Qian Liu (d. 932) was enfeoffed Prince of Yue in 902, to which was added Prince of Wu in 904; he claimed the title King of Wu-Yue in 907 and proclaimed his own reign title; his successors more modestly adhered to the reign titles of the Five Dynasties. The fifth king, Qian Shu, surrendered to the Song in 978. The state of Wu-Yue was noted for high standards of learning, wealth, and cultural development.

Min (36 years, 909-945; 5 rulers). Founder, Wang Shenzhi. Capital, Changle (Fuzhou, in present-day Fujian). Wang Shenzhi's father had held the office of Surveillance Commissioner from 892; Wang Shenzhi became Regional Military Governor and Prince of Min from 909. His son took the title of Emperor of Min in 933; at that time Wang Shenzhi was posthumously named Founding Emperor (Taizu). The state was divided when one of Wang

Shenzhi's fratricidal sons proclaimed himself the independent King of Yin (controlling the northwest portion of the state) in 943. The ruler of Min sought help from the Southern Tang, which first invaded and absorbed the breakaway Yin territory, and ultimately took over most of Min, while local Min leaders in Fuzhou proclaimed allegiance to Wu-Yue. Min was essentially vanquished by 945, although local fighting continued.⁹ Its rulers were among the most depraved of the Five Dynasties period.

Nanping (also called Jingnan) (39 years, 924-963; 5 rulers). Founder, Gao Jichang (also known as Gao Jixing). Capital, Jiangling. Held Jiangling and two neighboring districts on the Yangzi southwest of present-day Wuhan in southern Hubei. The founder, Gao Jichang, in service to Zhu Wen, founder of the Later Liang (907-923) of the Five Dynasties, was appointed Regional Military Governor at Jiangling in 907. In 924, shortly after the Later Liang dynasty fell, he and his successors claimed title of King of Nanping. A small and weak state, Nanping tried to remain on proper terms with each of the successive Five Dynasties; it surrendered when Song armies invaded in 963.

Northern Han (28 years, 951-979; 4 rulers). Founder, Liu Min (earlier called Liu Chong). Capital, Taiyuan. Held present-day central Shanxi plus small adjacent portions of Shaanxi and Hebei. The only northern state among the Ten States, the Northern Han was an offshoot of the Later Han, founded in 947 by Liu Min's brother Liu Zhiyuan as the fourth of the Five Dynasties. When the Later Han fell to the Later Zhou at the end of 950, Liu Min formed a small state around the family's military power base in Shanxi and became a client state of the Liao dynasty. Liu Min maintained a fictive nephew-uncle relationship with the Liao emperor, but after 960 he also simultaneously carried on secret communications with the Song founder. When the second Song emperor invaded and captured Taiyuan in 979, Later Han surrendered to the Song.

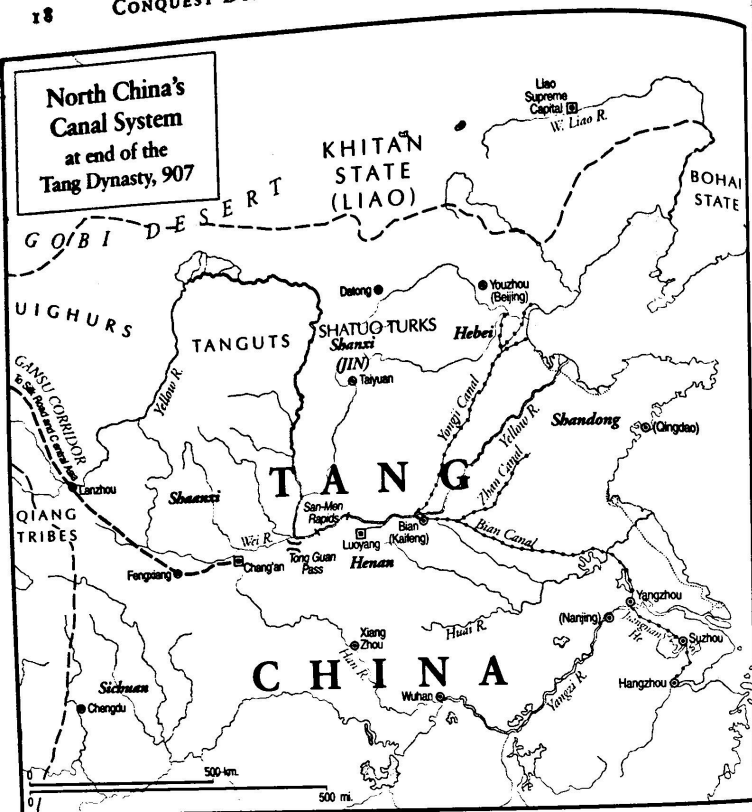
Other Polities. The term "Ten States" is a loose designation. In addition to those discussed, several other states within the present boundaries of China coexisted for short periods. In the north, two such must be named: Qi, in western Shaanxi, lasted from 907 to 924; and Yan, based at the site of present-day Beijing, existed from 911 to 913. Beyond the regions dominated by Chinese civilization in the southwest, what later became the Ming dynasty province of (also present-day) Yunnan was then an independent kingdom called Nanzhao. It was a federation of six states comprising a number of linguistically distinct non-Chinese peoples, some with histories going back several centuries, who through warfare were amalgamated into the kingdom of Nanzhao in the eighth century.¹⁰ Other portions of southern and southwestern China until very recent times existed under the control of independent polities not recognized by Chinese governments.

III. THE EASTWARD SHIFT OF THE POLITICAL CENTER

One trend that is clear-cut by the early tenth century, impelled by reactions to the failures of the Tang and the subsequent disorders of the Five Dynasties, is the shift of China's political power center out of Shaanxi Province in the northwest, eastward to the central Yellow River plain in Henan. The Tang's dual capitals were two hundred miles apart: Chang'an (present-day Xi'an), the "Western Capital," in the Wei River valley of southern Shaanxi, and Luoyang, its "Eastern Capital," in the central Yellow River drainage in Henan. Eighty-five miles still further east in Henan there now emerged a new national administrative center at Bian (present-day Kaifeng). This shift to the east was overdue. The Wei River valley was overpopulated in relation to its economic foundations; it had long been a grain-deficient region, in large part because of Chang'an's immense population and the large garrisons stationed there to protect it. Grain from other regions had to be transported into the capital to sustain its population. The large system of canals linking Luoyang to the lower Yangzi River, and also to points east and northeast, had been constructed in the seventh century by the Sui and the early Tang rulers. To supply the capital at Chang'an, however, there remained the problem of transporting grain overland to the west beyond Luoyang, by overland portage at the San-men Rapids on the Yellow River, and then on through the Tong Pass (Tong Guan) into the Chang'an region. This section of the Yellow River was essentially unnavigable. Land transport was expensive and inefficient. The huge grain supply needed to augment the capital region's production was always subject to interruption: the Tang government had been forced on several occasions to move temporarily to its Eastern Capital at Luoyang, at great expense and disruption, just to avoid starvation.¹¹ Yet throughout the Tang dynasty (618-907), the force of the capital region's historical identification with the great eras of the past, and the entrenched interests of the elite "eminent clans" based there, prevented a rationalization of the problem.

From the 880s onward, during the massive rebellions of the late Tang, the capital at Chang'an was sacked repeatedly and the region around it thoroughly pillaged. The regional military leaders who came to control the Tang state were not constrained by the previously limiting sentiments; they had to adapt to geopolitical realities. Zhu Wen, who eventually usurped the Tang throne in 907, brought the last Tang emperor east to Luoyang in 904, and soon thereafter moved his own capital still farther east to Kaifeng (Bian). Chang'an would never again be the capital of China. The Chang'an region and all of southern Shaanxi declined in importance thereafter. The administrative center of the Chinese state was fixed in the central Yellow River drainage in Henan through Northern Song times (until 1127).

The old Sui-Tang canal system functioned imperfectly by the tenth century, but it still defined the main routes of domestic trade and linked the economic center of China in the Yangzi River drainage to the North China Plain (Map 2). Water routes connected Hangzhou south of the Yangzi, and other points on the lower Yangzi, to the Huai River a hundred or more miles north of



MAP 2

the Yangzi, and then by canals on to the Yellow River near Kaifeng. Newly important sea routes supplemented the canal system, facilitating both diplomatic travel and economic transport from the Central China coast to Korea, Japan, Liaodong in the Khitan empire, and North China points.¹² By breaking up established patterns of trade and commerce, the political turmoil of the Five Dynasties era hastened the development of sounder economic relationships that came to define an era of prosperous commercial development during the ensuing Song period.

The Impoverishment of the Northwest

Another far-reaching consequence of this period was the desolation which constant civil war brought to the North China region controlled by the Five Dynasties; it stands in contrast to the relative stability and prosperity evident in the nine of the Ten States that lay to the south. None of the Five Dynasties

endured for as long as twenty years; some of the Ten States lasted for fifty or sixty years, and some in fact had controlled their territories even longer. The kingdom of Wu-Yue, for example, was created in 907, but its ruling family had controlled the region since the late Tang disorders of the 880s, and they maintained their control until they surrendered to the Song in 978. They provided a century of stability to that economically flourishing region on the Central China coast.¹³

The contrast in economic and social conditions between North China and most of the Ten States in Central and South China is very great. Although at its founding in 960 the Song dynasty placed its capital at Bian (Kaifeng) just south of the Yellow River on the North China Plain, its viability depended on its economic integration with the territories of the former Ten States in Central and South China, not on economic links to the older regions of the north. In this we see a maturation of a pattern that would remain for centuries: considerations of defense were focused on the north, while economic viability depended on relations with Central and South China.

The Five Dynasties period thus hastened the integration of the new and more rationally based political center in the north, the capital at Kaifeng, with economically dominant Central China, especially the lower Yangzi region (China's "historic south"). The newly achieved North China center of power based in Henan not only was necessitated by the economic decline of the old northwest cradle of Chinese civilization centered on Chang'an, but also was relevant to the shift to the east of the steppe powers. China's strategic defense of its northern borders was no longer dominated by threats from the northwest but by new threats coming from the north and northeast, first from the Khitans, thereafter from the Jurchens and Mongols, and, in the seventeenth century, the Manchus. The shift of attention away from the northwest, in fact, helped to create the circumstances that allowed the northwest frontier Tangut state of Xi Xia to fill the vacuum left behind as the Chinese power center moved eastward.

The Political Heritage of Late Tang Decentralization

It is worth repeating here that the political instability reflected in the short-lived Five Dynasties, and in the separate regional power bases that produced the Ten States, was a direct outgrowth of the decentralization of political and military power that marked later Tang history. By the mid-ninth century the centralized Tang state had ceased to exist except in name, the power of emperor and court having been wholly overshadowed by the power of Regional Military Governors (*jiedushi*). At the court, the emperors had become pawns of warring eunuch and civil bureaucrat factions, while the military governors throughout the provinces, independent of Chang'an, developed new and more efficient instruments of regional power in order to enhance their prospects of surviving in the competition among themselves, and in defiance of the center.

Some of the more successful among those regional warlords became emper-

ors during the Five Dynasties; in other cases they became the rulers of the Ten States. Still others remained de facto rulers of smaller units consisting of a prefecture or two, and made no claims to higher political authority. The more important among those who claimed the title of emperor or king on coming to power drew lessons from the political weaknesses of the Tang state. They adopted more effective forms of governing and worked out centralized power structures within their regions in the last decades of the Tang. It is interesting that the object lesson drawn from the example of the weak Tang center, which had made their own usurpation of regional power possible, is what led them to see the need for stronger central authority. A significant shift in the organization of state power on that pragmatic new model was thus accomplished during the half-century of the Five Dynasties era. That paved the way for the succeeding Chinese imperial state under the Song dynasty to attain a centralized power structure that would not be compromised by regional military governors or held hostage to battling court factions. The histories of the Later Zhou (951-960) and its offshoot, the Song dynasty (960-1279), are particularly meaningful in the light of these late Tang and Five Dynasties developments.¹⁴

Decline of the Old Elite Leadership

Another consequence of the political power realignments of the Five Dynasties era is the disappearance of the old, long-entrenched social elite which had been in existence from well before the Tang dynasty. That stratum had long functioned as a self-perpetuating system of "eminent clans" (or "great lineages"), whose leading members constituted an elite national service corps that could monopolize appointments to the civil bureaucracy so as to dominate the court and overawe their home localities. They directed the disposition of wealth and the retention of privilege; they dominated the access to learning and prestige; and they oversaw the formulation of policy. Their supremacy had begun to erode under the stresses created by late Tang political weaknesses, but it was the prolonged crisis of Tang collapse that permanently displaced those holders of inherited privilege by physically eliminating large numbers of them, and by destroying both their economic base in protected landholding and their ties to political power.¹⁵ This profound social change established the conditions under which a new, more egalitarian elite based on merit was able to emerge under the Song (described in Chapter 6, Section III).

We thus can see that, as was the case in other brief periods of great stress in Chinese history, this half-century of deep social shock resolved many long-standing problems of "institutional lag," by which is meant the typical failure of institutions to adapt rapidly enough to changing conditions. The destabilizing stresses further hastened the pace of change. We should not assume that all the consequences were benign or that the forms they took were somehow inevitable. But that they occurred is undeniable.

IV. SIMULTANEOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN THE TEN STATES

The remnants of Tang dynasty high cultural life declined noticeably in the north under the Five Dynasties. Warfare there was more destructive, and the life of a dynasty was too short to establish the arts of peace under its sponsorship. The greater margin of agricultural productivity in Central and South China produced higher levels of disposable wealth than were possible in the north, supported steady tax revenues, and encouraged the burgeoning trade based on specialized regional crafts and on imported products. That was in sharp contrast to the steady impoverishment of Northwest China. The wealth of the south drew many displaced members of the old Tang elite, as well as migrations of ordinary people, to its more peaceful regions. The courts of the emperors of Former and Later Shu at Chengdu in Sichuan, of the Southern Tang at present-day Nanjing, and of the kings of Wu-Yue at present-day Hangzhou, were particularly important for their large concentrations of poets and scholars, essayists and painters, many drawn from the displaced Tang elite.

The technology of blockprinting used for producing printed books dates back at least to the seventh century and made considerable progress through the Tang, but in many ways it matured into a fully developed art only during the tenth century. The first complete printed edition of the eleven Confucian classics (plus two supplementary works) in 130 volumes was produced at the courts of the Five Dynasties, between 932 and 953, under the uninterrupted sponsorship of a leading minister of state, Feng Dao, who served ten rulers under five successive dynasties. "This was the first time that the Confucian classics were printed, and the beginning of official publications for sale by the National Academy."¹⁶ Despite the disorder of the age, both Luoyang and Kaifeng were major centers of printing in the north. The arts of printing grew even more rapidly in the south. Among the capitals of the Ten States, both Chengdu and Nanjing, and especially Hangzhou under the sponsorship of the kings of Wu-Yue, became centers of fine printing, producing a range of classical, religious, and contemporary secular works for wide distribution throughout the entire country and for export abroad. Printing now extended its range well beyond the numerous printings of Buddhist texts, which had been its principal focus up to this time.

An anthology of lyric poetry (*ci*) compiled and printed during the Five Dynasties is of great importance in literary history. It is the work called *Huajian ji* (Amidst the Flowers Anthology), produced in the state of Later Shu of the Ten States, its preface dated 940. The genre of poetry called *ci* was new in mid-Tang times and flourished greatly during the Five Dynasties and on into the Song. *Huajian ji* is the earliest anthology devoted entirely to this genre, and is important for preserving some of the earliest examples of *ci* songs by the great Tang forerunners, but even more important as evidence of the genre's widespread currency in the early tenth century. This anthology contains some 500 poems by 18 authors, most of whom lived in or had some connection to Sichuan, where the Former and Later Shu states were located.

The name *Huajian* suggests dalliance among the "flowers," here meaning courtesans and prostitutes; the poems are poets' words set to tunes in the new musical forms of mid- and late Tang. The musical patterns of these songs, which entertainers specialized in singing, determined the requirements of *ci* prosody—that is, their distinctive long and short lines of specified syllable length and number—determined where the rhyme words should be placed, and so on. It was an intricate prosody, fixing the poetic form of *ci* that continued to be written even when the form later came to be divorced from the music, the words no longer sung, the poems written as a new standard form of literary expression. In the early phase of this important poetic genre's development, represented in the *Huajian ji*, the poems still reflected their use as entertainers' songs. Not surprisingly, most of them are love poetry—languid, romantic, often erotic. To later Confucian-minded critics the collection was pervaded by the moral degeneracy of the Five Dynasties era, which they saw exemplified not only in the careers of such officials as Feng Dao, who "shamelessly" shifted his loyalty with each change of dynasty,¹⁷ but also in the opulent decadence of elite life at the southern courts.

The Southern Tang court, especially under the second and third of its three emperors, Li Jing and Li Yu (father and son, who together reigned from 943 to 975), was a gathering place for poets and painters. The emperors and some of their literary courtiers are ranked among the most important poets of the entire lyric song (*ci*) tradition, especially Li Yu, the "Last Emperor" (Houzhu) of the Southern Tang. He was captured by the Song armies in 975 and was poisoned in captivity three years later. Unlike his father, who was both a fine poet and an energetic ruler, Li Yu was incompetent as a ruler. Yet he possessed a boundless capacity for aesthetic experience and for literary expression, especially as a lyric poet, and he greatly broadened the scope of the *ci* lyric song genre. He is considered the representative poet of his own age, and one who exerted a powerful influence on the poetry of the succeeding Northern Song period.¹⁸ Even today he ranks among the most widely appreciated poets of all time: his lyrics employ simple and direct language, but in their evocative imagery, sentimentality, and truly profound feelings they are fiendishly difficult to capture in translation.

The unfortunate "Last Emperor" also was a noted calligrapher and prose essayist and, like his father, a patron of painting. Nanjing was at that time the most important center of painting in China. A dozen masters who lived there rank among the best artists of the century. Many of them lived into the early decades of the Song dynasty, and established styles and traditions that profoundly influenced early Song art.¹⁹ Unfortunately, much of their work is known today only through copies made a century or more later. Nevertheless, the distinctive achievement of these artists is well attested.

The court of Wu-Yue, with its capital at the great coastal city of Hangzhou south of modern Shanghai, was rich in economic resources, and used its maritime location to extend its relations with Japan, Korea, North China ports, and the Liao in Manchuria. Its kings, of the Qian family, were great sponsors of Buddhism and of the related arts of architecture, temple decoration, and

religious sculpture. Hangzhou began to grow into a great cosmopolitan center, foreshadowing its importance as the national capital in Southern Song times.

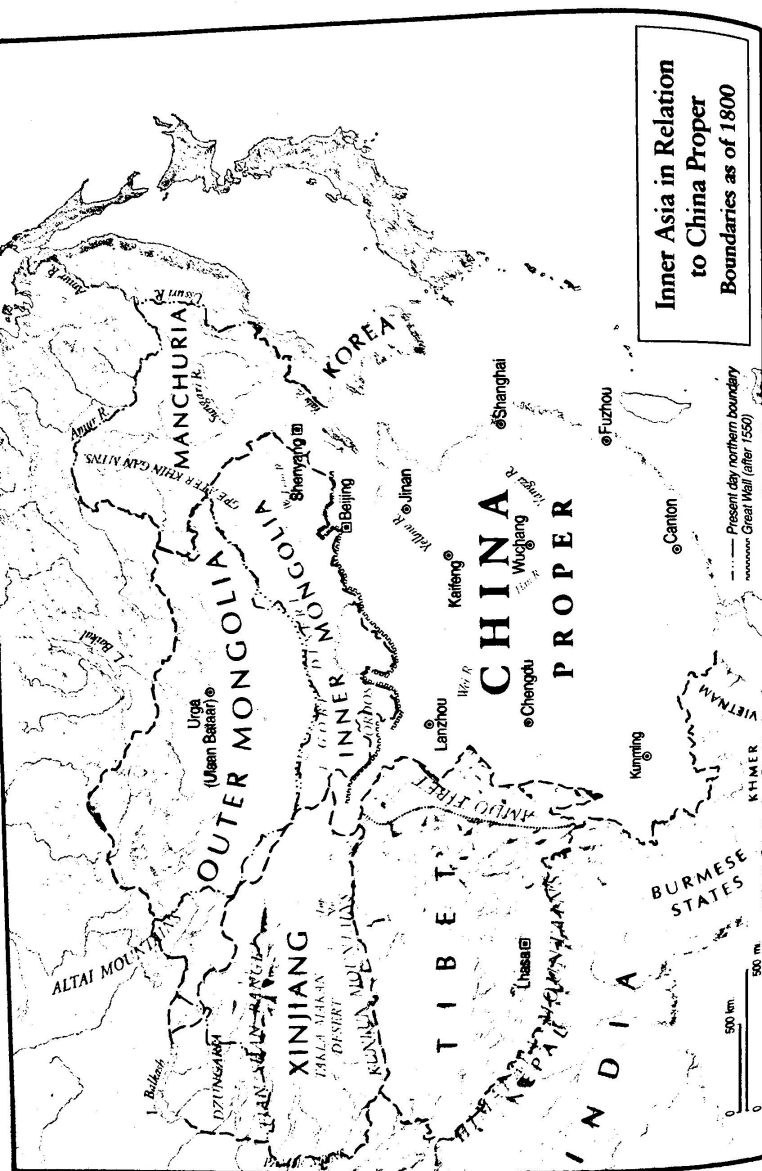
Careful study of the Ten States is needed to enlarge our understanding of the transition from the Tang dynasty to the Song; it holds the potential for explaining many things, such as regional distinctiveness, linguistic change, relations of Chinese with non-Chinese populations, developments in material culture, and the like. A brief interlude between two great dynastic eras, and one that has not drawn the sympathies of traditional scholars, it has tended to get lost in the flow of the more momentous events of history. The discussion of the period here can do little more than provide a reference guide to some of the names, dates, and places, but cannot convey the interest and importance that lie there.

V. CHINA AND INNER ASIA IN GEOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Inner Asia assumes so important a place in Chinese later imperial history that it must be defined and explained before we go further into the history of post-Tang China in the tenth and later centuries. The reader will be referred to this section at a number of points. At risk of repeating topics mentioned in Section I of this chapter, some of the geographic and historical contexts of China's relations with Inner Asia will be touched upon again here.

Historians increasingly agree in using "Central Asia" to designate the regions known in the past as Sogdiana, Bactria, Transoxiana, Fergana, and the like. Transoxiana²⁰ is called that because Alexander the Great crossed the Oxus River in 327 B.C.E. in his eastward campaigns: the area "across the Oxus" was then the ancient kingdom of Sogdiana. Loosely, "Central Asia" means to us today the northern portion of modern Afghanistan and adjoining regions of the former USSR along the Amu Darya (i.e., the ancient Oxus) and the Syr Darya (i.e., the Jaxartes) rivers, lying to the west of the Pamir Mountains and east of the Caspian Sea. The Russians did not establish control there until the nineteenth century, but in modern administrative geography that region now comprises Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kirghizstan, and southern parts of Kazakhstan of the former USSR, along with northern Afghanistan. During much of China's imperial age that region was the home of flourishing Turkic city-states including Bukhara, Balkh, Merv, Samarkand, and others with similarly evocative historical associations. Many writers, however, continue to use "Central Asia" more loosely to include large parts of what I shall here call Inner Asia.

"Inner Asia," in distinction to "Central Asia," is used here to designate the vast region east of the Pamirs and extending all the way to the Pacific Ocean. It includes Tibet and Xinjiang in the west, north of China Proper from the latitude of China's Great Wall all the way to but not including the Siberian forests and tundra, and east to the Pacific coast. Inner Asia is thus defined as the "interior" of East Asia, whether seen from Russian Siberia or from China.



MAP 3

From the Pamirs east to Vladivostok is a distance of 3,000 miles; from south to north Inner Asia incorporates a band 1,000 or more miles wide. The core of Inner Asia consists of the regions known, from west to east, as Tibet, Chinese Turkestan or Xinjiang (Sinkiang), Inner and Outer Mongolia, and Manchuria (which the Chinese call "the Northeast," Dongbei). Inner Asia also includes areas of the former USSR east of the Pamirs inhabited today largely by Turkic and Mongolian peoples of the Russian steppe, just to the north of Chinese Turkestan and the Mongolian Republic (formerly Outer Mongolia).²¹

If we include as part of the historical Tibet the Chinese-Tibetan upland comprising the western Chinese border province of Qinghai (or Kokonor) and the former province of Xikang, now largely absorbed into the new boundaries of China's Sichuan Province, that entire area of Inner Asia is well over 4 million square miles in extent (Map 3). About 2 million square miles of that is within the boundaries of China today; by comparison, the area of "China Proper," or "China inside the Wall," is about 1.8 million square miles.²²

The modern political boundaries in that part of the world have little geographic or cultural relevance for the history of the region; they do not serve any needs of the historian other than to help identify ancient sites on modern maps. Owen Lattimore has used the expressive geographical metaphor of the "Inner Asian Sea" for the steppes and deserts stretching from Manchuria to the Pamirs, seeing its oases as islands and the edges of the sedentary societies encircling it as its shores. This well describes the historical reality of the relationship of the sown (that is, of sedentary agriculture) to the steppe, the sedentary "shore and island dwellers" in relation to the "sea-roaming" nomads.

In Han and Tang times the portions of Inner Asia in which the Chinese were deeply involved lay to their northwest, within the Tibetan borderland and in Chinese Turkestan, the modern province of Xinjiang. From the tenth century on, the areas of China's major involvements in Inner Asia shifted to the east, to the regions known today as Mongolia and Manchuria ("the Northeast"). Simultaneously, but for different reasons, the political and demographic centers of China also shifted eastward, away from the northwest provinces, which had been the locus of China's early capitals and which had been its springboard into Xinjiang.

At its southern and western edges, Inner Asia enfolds Asia's loftiest and most forbidding mountains, the Himalayas and the Pamirs. To the north and east of those great barriers, three mountain chains split off and run to the east, extending into China and Inner Asia for a thousand miles or more: the Kunlun Mountains divide Tibet from Xinjiang; the Tian Shan Range divides Xinjiang into two vast basins, the Tarim Basin on the south and the Dzungaria Basin to the north; and, farther north, the Altai Range divides Xinjiang from Mongolia.

South of the Tian Shan Range, the huge Tarim Basin extends a thousand miles from Kashgar and Yarkand in the west to Hami and Dunhuang in the east, on the edges of China Proper. Most of it is an immense, uninhabited wasteland known as the Takla Makan, a desert of legendary harshness and

danger, yet crossed by the fabled Silk Roads connecting China to western Asia. The most important of those routes ran across its northern rim, "island-hopping" from one oasis to the next. Dzungaria, to the north of the Tian Shan, is mostly rolling steppe, and especially at its eastern end it is deep in summer grass on which herds fatten. It is not desert, yet like the Takla Makan to its south, it is subject to extremes of heat and cold and to fierce winter winds. Mongolia, today divided into Inner Mongolia (an administrative region of China) and Outer Mongolia (more correctly, the Republic of Mongolia, recently independent after long being subject to domination by the USSR), lies north and east of the Altai Range. Mongolia is a flatter plateau mostly between 3,000 and 5,000 feet in elevation. That great Mongolian heartland (the Mongol khanate's "hearthland") enfolds vast deserts—the Gobi, the Ordos, and the Alashan—within its southern and western boundaries, but has grassy steppelands farther north and east. The farther east one goes in Mongolia, the more reliable are the rainfall and the grass, but trees are few and forests unknown. Still farther east, beyond the Greater Khingan (Da Xing'an) Mountains in Chahar, just north of Beijing, one crosses into Manchuria, with its rich plains and valleys and, still farther north, its deep forests.

Southern Manchuria was, intermittently, administratively part of China as early as the beginnings of the imperial era, and remained so off and on until the eighth century. Thereafter, its remaining Chinese population was concentrated in the southwestern coastal zone. Except for that narrow zone, Manchuria did not acquire a large Chinese population until nineteenth-century migrations from North China occurred. Not counting that newly populated segment of Inner Asia, the entire core area of Inner Asia, from the Amur River west to the Pamirs, held a population of only about 12 million in the early decades of the twentieth century, when China Proper had a population of around 500 million. In the tenth century China had a population of perhaps 80 million (then a third of the world's population), whereas all of the Inner Asian core area held about 5 million people divided into a very large number of nations and tribal groupings. That is necessarily a rough estimate but it cannot be far wrong. The Khitan population in the tenth century has been carefully estimated to have been less than 1 million. The Mongol population in areas subject to the Yuan dynasty's rule in the late thirteenth century, probably more than half the Mongol population at that time, might be roughly estimated at one-half million.²³ Figures for the Tibetan and Jurchen populations in the twelfth century are not reliable enough to cite even in rough estimate, but could not have been much larger than the estimates for the Mongol and Khitan populations offered here. In short, we cannot know for certain the population of Inner Asia at any point in the span of history covered by this volume, but we can be quite secure in describing the area as one of sparsest habitation, of immense empty distances, with climate often ranging from harsh to worse, conditions testing to the full the toughness and adaptability of its inhabitants, and of all who traveled or campaigned across it.

Yet there were and are rich oases in Xinjiang, favored islands of commerce

and agriculture set in the desert sea, often constituting city-states of some importance. The cities and their surrounding oases were links in the chain of supply stations sustaining the caravan routes stretching west from China that crossed the Pamirs, and in a tenuous way linked East Asia to the farther shores of sedentary life in India and Persia and farther west, even to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. Apart from these important oasis city-states, there were in the tenth century few cities of size and importance in all the rest of Inner Asia. To be sure, three of the five Liao dynasty capitals built early in the tenth century lay north of the Great Wall line (then a line of defended passes, not a continuous wall). Those capital cities, however, were populated by forced migrants, mostly Chinese from the southern coastal rim of Manchuria or North China. Except for the sedentary inhabitants of the oases, the other Inner Asian peoples themselves were not city dwellers.

Agriculture was intensively practiced in the fertile oases of Chinese Turkestan scattered across the Tarim and Dzungaria basins. Some of those were several hundred square miles in extent. They depended on irrigation from short rivers that descended from the mountain ranges; as they flowed farther from their sources in the high mountains, those rivers disappeared in the sands. The agrarian inhabitants were primarily Turkic; some were literate peoples of quite advanced civilizations with strong cultural ties both to China and to places farther west, in Central Asia. Farther east, throughout most of Mongolia agriculture was scarcely possible because the rainfall averages only from three to ten inches a year. Farther on, to the east of the Khingan Mountains in Manchuria, however, the rainfall is a reliable twenty to thirty or more inches a year. The Liao, the Jin, and the Qing dynasties all originated there, among peoples—the Khitans, the Jurchens, and the Manchus—who could easily have practiced agriculture, and sometimes did, but who in their rise from local tribal leadership to military overlordship of enlarged territories, in preparation for conquest, found it advantageous to identify with the potent pattern of militarized steppe nomadism.

Pastoral nomadism appeared in the Inner Asian region perhaps no more than 2,000 years ago. Anthropologists and historians no longer subscribe to theories that saw nomadism as a primitive stage in the development of all mankind, following the stage of hunter-gatherers, and to be followed inevitably by the more advanced stage of sedentary agriculture.²⁴ Even though Stone Age man everywhere appears to have been nomadic in the sense of wandering about in search of food, pastoral nomadism as it developed in Inner Asia (and some other parts of the world) is quite different. It is an advanced form of social organization, the preference of people whose forebears probably had practiced agriculture, perhaps in regions of quite limited or marginal productivity along the shores of the Inner Asian desert "sea." To those reluctant agriculturalists the alternative of nomadism offered more than did the hard life of growing wheat or millet in arid regions. The Inner Asian core area offered conditions that permitted the highest development of the potential in nomadism, sustained by its wandering herds of cattle and sheep and the use of camels and horses for transport or for war. Only under conditions which

to them represented failure would those nomads settle down in one place long enough to scratch out and harvest a summer's crop. They looked with scorn on farmers, and though dependent on neighboring farming peoples for grain, iron, textiles, and other essentials, they much preferred to acquire those by raiding or coercive exploitation. Agriculturalists and nomads thus coexisted in an unbalanced symbiosis, nomads needing items that only stable agricultural communities could provide, while their sedentary neighbors needed nothing from the nomads, yet could not evade their demands. The rich oases were most vulnerable to raids and conquest, and could be forced to provision the first phases of nomadic state development. But beyond that, the scale of their economic support to nomadic power buildups was limited.

Later imperial China is a period of China's and Inner Asia's profound impact on each other. The impact was mutual: it worked in both directions. The historian, however, must write the history of this period primarily from the Chinese record. For these as for most centuries it is the Chinese record that provides the fullest and most factual account of all things affecting China. True, that impressive record distorts events involving non-Chinese peoples by perceiving them as occurring on the periphery of the world's only civilization. For, while not always well informed about other peoples or necessarily unsympathetic to them as fellow human beings, the Chinese nonetheless have disparaged them as people not yet fully within the boundaries of civilized—that is, of Chinese—life. The modern reader may not feel full affinity with that arrogant (even if understandable) prejudice. Yet similar attitudes are familiar in many national histories and are not unknown in our own.

Chinese still have difficulty coming to terms with the long period of invasion and alien domination that began with the Liao dynasty early in the tenth century. Like the ancient Greeks, the Chinese of the past designated peoples who did not use their language and share their cultural values "barbarians." Nevertheless, in recent decades, under ideological imperatives of our time, modern Chinese in China have reversed that narrow view, but only to adopt or retroactively co-opt all the non-Chinese aliens, including those who dominated this period, now classing them as their "non-Han but Chinese" junior partners in the growth of a multiethnic Chinese nation. If this view suits certain modern Chinese political or psychological needs, it is nevertheless strikingly ahistorical, and somewhat disturbing in its patronizing attitude toward peoples who thought of themselves as fiercely independent, and as possessors of cultures having their own integrity despite interactions and influences derived from the Chinese edge of their world. Most modern Chinese historians continue, much like their predecessors throughout several millennia, to accept the preeminence of Chinese cultural values in all periods of East and Inner Asian history. Their arguments can be impressive, if ultimately not convincing to all of their neighboring peoples. "Objectivity" in such matters is difficult to achieve. To repeat, we are perforce almost completely dependent on Chinese sources, and very largely on modern Chinese scholarship, with all the past and present biases and subjective cultural attitudes they embody. Yet there are many Chinese as well as other historians of today who strive

to escape the limitations implicit in that circumstance. In this work, difficult though it is given the sources, I shall endeavor to establish a distinct point of view.

When the Inner Asian chieftains scanned their horizons, there were many targets of military expansion to tempt their ambitious warriors. But beyond all the others, China was the great prize, for plunder and for more long-range exploitation. The paramount challenge to Inner Asian tribal peoples in those middle centuries of China's imperial age was to create confederations that could aggregate large enough armies, organized on the supremely efficient steppe nomad model, so that they could prevail over at least a portion of the Chinese nation. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the Mongols carried that development to its ultimate heights and conquered not only all of China but all of Central and West Asia and much of Russia as well.

The Mongols' success in conquest is unmatched in history, yet even before them the organization of entire tribal societies for mobility, and the honing of each of their member's skills for warfare, had reached impressive levels of success among their Turkic predecessors. The Kirghiz, the Khazars, and the Oghuz Turks, the Kipchaks and Kumans, and other Turkic-speaking predecessors of the Mongols, all of whom appear to have originated in eastern Inner Asia, began to extend their empires to the west no later than the sixth century C.E. The khanate of the Western Turks controlled most of Central Asia in the sixth century, and at the same time the Khazars, whose language was almost certainly Turkic, and whose rulers converted to Judaism in 740 C.E., had controlled the regions from the northern shores of the Caspian westward into the Ukraine from the sixth century onward. We thus see that the westward spread of Turkic peoples, some reaching as far as Byzantium and eastern Europe, had long preceded the westward expansion of the Mongols in the thirteenth century.²⁵

Others moved into the central parts of Inner Asia that we now call Mongolia and created their conquest dynasties in symbiosis with China. The Tangut Xi Xia, whose roots were in the Tibetan uplands of Northwest China, and the Khitan Liao from the Northeast (Manchuria), illustrate the variety of linkages that could be created between advanced nomadism and the Chinese culture area in the tenth century. The Jurchens, the Mongols, and later the Manchus offered further variations on this theme. During the thirteenth century, steppe history fully merged with the mainstream of Chinese history in the Mongol conquest of the entire Chinese culture area and the establishment there of their Yuan dynasty.

That long span of time, roughly half a millennium from the rise of the Khitans to the end of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, was a period of profound changes in Chinese civilization, and of even more remarkable changes in the civilizations and the political organizations of the Inner Asian nations which created the conquest dynasties. Northern tribal states and Chinese dynasties lived in close, continuous interaction. An account of the Inner Asian states is thus properly central to this account of Chinese history. That is not to deny that the Inner Asian civilizations also have their own integral histories—

histories that deserve to be narrated from the point of view of their own states and cultures, and in full consideration of all their other boundaries and their further relations with other nations. They need not be examined *only* from the point of view of their place in Chinese history. But this is a history of China, "China" signifying here, as it has historically, an account of the (Han) Chinese people and of their distinctive civilization. We must start here with the tenth century to trace a coherent story, albeit one that can include only an incomplete and one-sided account of Inner Asian history, distorted by being viewed—for our present purposes—as an extension of Chinese history. That too is a valid point of view, even if it is only one among several that might be adopted.

To begin the story of this phase of Chinese history, I shall then start in the early tenth century, with the brilliant achievements of the Turco-Mongol or Proto-Mongol Khitan nation in creating new forms for exploiting the power of their pastoral nomad state. That extraordinary story follows next.

2



ABAOJI

With the career of Abaoji, a Khitan chieftain who became the founder of the Liao dynasty, a new phase in relations between China and its neighbors to the north began. This remarkable leader set the goal of gaining a foothold within the zone of sedentary life at the edge of China. To incorporate such an addition to his steppe empire, and with the intent to expand it into China, he devised the system of dual administration, the effective tool by which he, his Khitan successors, and subsequent conquerors would govern simultaneously over both nomadic and farming populations, exploiting the wealth of China to build vast empires. Thus began the later millennium of China's imperial era.

"He grew up to be a man nine *chi* tall. The upper part of his face was broad, the lower part sharply chiseled; the flash of his eyes pierced a person. He could draw a bow of three hundred pounds." Those few lines tell us all we know about the physical appearance of Abaoji, the founder of the Liao dynasty. But the Chinese historians recording his life several centuries later also recalled that his birth and early life were marked by portents auguring future greatness: his mother dreamed that the sun fell from the sky into her bosom; she became pregnant thereafter, and when she gave birth to him, the room was filled with mysterious light and extraordinary fragrance. The newborn infant's body was like that of a three-year-old child; at three months he could walk, and at one year could speak. He was able to know things that had not yet come to pass.¹

Such legends surround the origins of many heroes in East Asian history. Abaoji, the supreme chieftain of the Khitan (Chinese: Qidan) people and founder of the Liao empire, deserves these symbols of greatness. The real achievements of his life were of such magnitude that sober historians were willing to retain legendary corroborations of his exceptional qualities. He was a "man of the steppe" whose heroic qualities in strategy and warfare, whose

courage, strength, and cunning, made him an indomitable conqueror. Yet the truly unusual quality of this man lay in his ability to analyze the character of his own and of Chinese civilization and to create instruments for bringing them together into a stable, workable system of empire that his Khitan people could dominate. The Khitan-Liao model of conquest and rule provided a pattern that, if not precisely followed, nonetheless powerfully influenced the successor Jurchen-Jin, the Mongol-Yuan, and, in the seventeenth century, the Manchu-Qing dynasties of conquest.

Did Abaoji possess the "psychic mobility" to imagine a political world that did not yet exist?² Perhaps not; it is not necessary to see him as an abstract thinker creating new ideal political forms, for 500 years of Khitan-Chinese interaction lay behind his extraordinary personal achievement. That historical memory provided a base from which to develop new modes and solutions. His achievement resided in drawing on that historical experience as presented to him by his advisers, in making pragmatic decisions to implement new forms, and in his determination to realize a new era through practical institutions for governing. The founders of the subsequent conquest dynasties did not have that depth of experience in their own histories, but Abaoji's achievement became fixed in their historical memories as well, and was made credible to them by his untarnished integrity in remaining a true man of the steppe throughout his long involvement with the Chinese. The Liao experience thus possesses great weight in the histories of Inner Asia and of China.

I. THE KHITANS AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

The Khitan people lived on the eastern slopes of the Greater Khingan (Xing'an) Mountain Range which extends south to north and at the time divided Mongolia from Manchuria.³ Those well-watered, grassy slopes were ideal for herding cattle and horses, the basic wealth of the Khitans. Their pastoral, nomadic way of life was formed through centuries of conflict and cultural interaction with neighboring steppe and sedentary peoples.

On the western side of the Greater Khingan Mountains lived the more typical nomadic steppe peoples, their economy dependent on sheep and camels and on the necessity to move about to utilize the scantier pastures of the Mongolian plateau. The Khitans were like those peoples to their west in being horse breeders and mounted warriors and were close to them in their way of life. Some of those can be identified by old tribal names such as the Shiwei and the Xi, who had intermarried with the Khitans and provided what we may call the more volatile "Mongol" element in Khitan life. There also were remnants of the Uighurs, Turkic people who in the ninth century had been driven west into Turkestan (Xinjiang) when their great empire occupying what we now call Mongolia was destroyed by another Turkic people, the Kirghiz. The Uighurs had been powerful enemies of the Tang state in the eighth and ninth centuries, yet occasionally had been drawn into military alliances with the Chinese. The Shiwei, the Xi, the Tatars, and other such warlike tribal peoples occupying the endless plains of Mongolia to the west

offered the Khitans the challenge of building a great steppe empire by expansion in that direction.

To the east and northeast, all the way to the deep forests of the Amur River basin, dwelt the Jurchens. They lived in small, dispersed tribal groups. Those farther to the north and east still lived by hunting and fishing in the forests; those that had spread south and westward into central Manchuria's open plains combined a woodsman's way of life with simple agriculture and pig rearing. Skilled woodsmen and hunters, when they eventually adapted to the horse and mounted warfare they became dangerous neighbors.

East and southeast from the Khitan homeland, across the Liao River and south to the Yalu River, was the Bohai nation. Some of the Bohai people still lived by hunting and fishing, but in large part they had become a settled agricultural people who also kept in subjugation a farming population made up mainly of conquered Chinese and Koreans. The Koreans pronounced their name Parhae, under which spelling it appears in many histories. The Korean cultural element may have been the dominant one in their civilization. The Bohai had figured importantly in Chinese history in Tang times as a powerful enemy state gradually depriving Tang China of its far northeast territories in what would be modern Liaoning Province of China's Northeast (Manchuria).

On all sides, except to the south, where all these peoples shared a boundary with the stable, sedentary civilization of China, the Khitans were surrounded by a great diversity of tribal nations whose identities and allegiances shifted like the sands of the Gobi. Alignments among tribes could produce federations, rapid buildups of political power capable of assembling mighty military force. The greater their mobility, the greater their striking force; that was their comparative advantage over their more sedentary neighbors. At the acme of their power, the steppe nomads could threaten even China, which, with its massive sedentary population, was the largest, most stable, and wealthiest society in the world. But their threat to China historically had been one of raiding and plundering through incursions at the borders, as yet without well-developed means for occupying and governing. And the Chinese always had the choice of going out into the steppe to fight them on their ground, or devising some sort of compromise to gain a measure of security. The Khitans had observed or had been directly involved in relations of that kind with the Chinese for centuries. They understood the mechanics of relationships between the steppe and the sown.

II. ETHNIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE COMMUNITY

I have referred here to a steppe world inhabited by Turkic, Mongol, and Tungusic peoples. That implies more linguistic confusion than actually existed, for those are the three branches of the Altaic language family. Those languages shared many features. All the Altaic languages appear to have arisen in northwestern Manchuria and northeastern Mongolia, on into the region around Lake Baikal. Speakers of some Turkic branches of Altaic moved westward, into the Mongolian plateau, and eventually on across the

Pamirs into southern Russia and to Anatolia. The modern Turks of Turkey are the westernmost and largest branch of the large Turkic-speaking family. Yet history's earliest known people who called themselves Turks (in Chinese records called Tujue, or Türks, to distinguish them from the modern Turks of Turkey) in the 6th century C.E. had lived on the Orchon River in the central part of today's Mongolia. That is where the Uighur Turks had their capital in the eighth and ninth centuries, before they were driven west into Xinjiang. The Uighurs have remained the largest and historically the most important of Turkic peoples in Chinese Inner Asia. The varieties of the various Turkic languages, from Istanbul all the way to China, have remained linguistically quite similar even where not mutually intelligible.

People clearly identified by the name "Mongol" do not appear in history until the twelfth century. Speakers of the Mongol languages today are divided into three main divisions, found all the way from northern Afghanistan to Manchuria, but mostly concentrated in the central part of Inner Asia, in Inner and Outer Mongolia. The Khitans are sometimes called Turko-Mongols, and their language proto-Mongol, suggesting that those two branches of Altaic had not yet clearly differentiated. Culturally, the Khitans' obvious affinities were with the slightly later Mongols. They were more clearly people of the steppe than were any of the Tungusic peoples to their east. Their ancestral legends link them to the other proto-Mongol peoples, but their language shows a very large number of terms derived from or related to Uighur Turkic. It is quite possible that the population and their ordinary language belonged to the Mongol division of Altaic, but that, as their tribal state interacted with a variety of powerful neighbors, they borrowed much technical language, particularly in government. The Uighurs were the most successful of the Khitans' steppe neighbors in the period of Khitan emergence, from the sixth to the ninth centuries; the pattern of Khitan-Uighur interaction, now friendly, now hostile, could explain a good deal of this language borrowing.

The Tungusic division of the Altaic family of languages includes Jurchen, the later Manchu language, and other remnants of what historically have been large and sometimes powerful tribal confederations originating in the easternmost parts of Inner Asia. The languages of the Bohai, the Koreans, and, according to some scholars, even the Japanese also belong to the Tungusic wing of the Altaic family. Unlike the Khitans and the Mongols to their west, the groups farther east that we can identify as speakers of Tungusic languages, valued the land and did not scorn agriculture, even when they adapted fully to the nomads' methods of mobile warfare. We can include them as "people of the steppe" even though they lived east of the steppe proper, because in their rise to conquest dynasty status they chose to broaden their semi-sedentary way of life by grafting mobile steppe warfare onto it.

But all of the distinctions based on language merely point out the weakness of our ethnic labels. We have no reasonable alternatives to using linguistic identifications for peoples, even though we must recognize that they are tentative labels and that they do not in themselves tell us very much. For most of the Inner Asian peoples, of greater importance than their identification with

this or that division of the Altaic language family is the salient fact that all the Altaic languages displayed some degree of homogeneity. Their speakers all recognized one another as users of languages that, to be sure, were in most cases not mutually intelligible, but that they could without too much difficulty learn to understand, and this contributed to a sense of kinship among them. The fellowship shared by all the "people of the steppe" as against the farming Chinese was thus reinforced by their sense of linguistic and cultural community. Those affinities were strongest within the various Turkic languages of the Altaic language family, but were present in some measure throughout all the Altaic languages; extending from one end of Inner Asia to the other, these linguistic affinities underlay the ceaseless process of building confederations of tribes and nations. That, rather than defending and expanding a geographically delimited territorial home, was the characteristic political process of Inner Asian history.

The Khitans and the Uighurs. The Khitan people cherished legends of their past that extended back many centuries into oral tradition. The Khitan language did not have a script until the tenth century; our knowledge of their early history comes from Chinese records, in which we find the name "Khitans" transcribed in Chinese characters that today are pronounced *qidan*. Those references go back as far as the fourth century C.E. They become fuller and more informative two or three centuries later. During the Tang dynasty (618-907), the Khitans became at times subordinate to their powerful neighbor to the west, the Uighurs, in whose formal relations with Tang China they shared. The Uighurs' culture itself underwent rapid changes in the late ninth century, following their evacuation from the Mongolian Plateau after 842. As a nation newly located in Xinjiang, the Uighurs were converted to a new religion—the Manichaean religion founded in third-century Persia. They became literate, adopting from the Indo-European Sogdians a script that had come down via Aramaic from still earlier Semitic scripts. They also at this time gradually abandoned nomadism in favor of living in cities or agricultural city-states based on the oases of Xinjiang. The Khitans' "Uighur connection," heretofore so important to their national development, was not entirely broken off by the geographical movements or the cultural transformations of their Turkic mentors, but they themselves did not take those same paths. Instead, in the tenth century the Khitans moved into the power vacuum in the vast region we now call Mongolia and strove with considerable success to attach that region to their own new empire. Some enclaves of Uighurs who had remained behind when their nation was driven westward in the mid-ninth century came at that time under Khitan rule and continued to be an important source of knowledge to the Khitans as they developed new tools to aid their own national growth. The Uighurs also played important roles in the cultural and political development of other conquest dynasties thereafter.

Khitans leaders in the late ninth century observed how the Uighurs had entered into the Chinese forms of interstate relations with the Tang dynasty court and had successfully coerced the Tang government to pay them subsi-

dies, mainly annual payments of bolts of silk (a bolt of silk was a standard unit of value comparable to standard units of precious metals or to money). For a century or more that gave the Uighurs wealth with which to dominate trade and warfare throughout Inner Asia. The Khitans had also witnessed the intimidating effects of steppe cavalry, whether that of the Shatuo Turks, the Uighurs, the Kirghiz, or their own, in gaining the objectives important to Inner Asian peoples, often at the expense of the less martial Chinese. The Chinese defense usually was to "use the barbarians to control the barbarians." That is, nearer groups among the militarily aggressive peoples at the borders were attached to the Chinese state with subsidies, titles, border zone military offices, and Chinese court honors. Then they were induced to compete with one another and in that process to shield China against enemies farther away.

III. THE LESSONS OF HISTORY

Observing those examples, the Khitans probably saw quite clearly that when a steppe people by degrees gave up its nomadic mobility in exchange for the more comfortable sedentary life, it ran great risks of having to compete with the Chinese on their ground. Losing in that way their comparative advantage inevitably cost the nomads their cultural integrity; they slowly became just "little Chinese." The Koreans, a settled people of high culture, could sinify their social forms and become, as the Korean state of Silla (57 B.C.E.-935 C.E.) was proud to boast, a "little China." Silla could survive that cultural adaptation; its people were too tough, and their land too far away, as early Tang emperors had found out, for them to be annexed to China. But no steppe people on China's borders could become sinified and survive, except by migrating into China and being absorbed—another form of extinction. Under pressure from the conquering Kirghiz, in the mid-ninth century the Uighurs had moved out of the steppe, giving up the comparative advantages of nomadic life; but by going west into Xinjiang and adopting cultural forms drawn from western Asian models, they could remain apart from Chinese civilization. Yet they played an essential part in the Silk Route trade, and were able to serve as cultural intermediaries among peoples on all sides.

Neither the Korean nor the Uighur model was relevant to the Khitan situation. Moreover, the warning to nomadic peoples was clear: they must master the art of drawing resources from China without sacrificing their steppe integrity. Nonetheless, as was true of most Inner Asian peoples, whether they felt drawn to China, or whether they scorned the softer life of the sown, none could ignore China. The wealth that could be wrung from it could give mastery over all of Inner Asia. As the Tang state, fatally weakened following the internal rebellions and subsequent turmoil of the 870s, lost its power to control its neighbors, some of those neighbors were inexorably drawn into China's vortex as aggressors against it, and as rivals against one another in the rush to fatten on the Chinese prize. The stimulus to respond quickly and powerfully to growing opportunities on its southern borders with China

forced internal changes on the Khitan nation. The first decades of the tenth century mark the great watershed in Khitan political development.

IV. THE NEW LEADER EMERGES

By the 750s a line of Khitan supreme chieftains, or khans, who used the lineage name or surname Yaolian had risen to dominance. At the triennial councils of all the Khitan chieftains, a leader from their lineage was always "elected," that is, acknowledged as the khan. The Yaolian lineage maintained a monopoly on the supreme chieftainship for a century and a half, during which time they received the full diplomatic treatment from the Tang court. The first Yaolian khan was even awarded the Tang imperial surname, Li, by which he and his descendants are known in Chinese records. But if that counted as high honor at the Tang court, it meant little back in the steppe, where they continued to be known as the Yaolian. The khans appeared at the Chinese court with frequency, carried away honors and titles as well as monetary rewards, and generally served Tang interests quite well—except when they allied themselves with other Inner Asian nomadic peoples to make war on the Chinese.

Chinese sources from that period speak of the "Eight Tribes" of the Khitans, and the "Nine Tents" of the Yaolian lineage. The latter were the descendants of the nine generations of khans who had come from the Yaolian lineage, a spreading clan of royal relatives so numerous that they functioned as a ninth tribe. Among the "Eight Tribes" constituting the bulk of the Khitan nation, the largest and most powerful was the Yila tribe. By the late ninth century its leaders in particular had begun to express dissatisfaction with the Yaolian khans and their management of the China relationship.

Abaoji was born in 872, the son of the elected chieftain of the Yila tribe. In 901 he was himself elected to succeed as the chieftain of the Yila. In this context, "election" means that he presented himself to the triennial council of his tribe's leaders and claimed the right to be acknowledged their chieftain, just as the Yaolian khans were reconfirmed in their khanate every three years, or a successor khan was confirmed by the formality of a tribal chieftains' council. Leaders of a certain status, normally inherited, could expect to be eligible for such formal recognition of their leadership so long as they also displayed the approved personal qualities. This system was not as rigid as a closed aristocracy, and much less so than an inherited kingship, but neither was it as open as a fully democratic process. It well served the leadership needs of nomadic tribal societies, where individual leaders had to merit approval in order to be personally effective in gaining adherents and building intertribal relations. One element of their leadership potential came from inheriting a leading clan's accumulated mystique of power. Yet, of all that clan's potential heirs in any generation, at the triennial assembly, it was the individual who had best displayed the personal qualities of leadership who would be acknowledged the next, or the continuing, chieftain.

Abaoji's clan did not have a surname. Surnames were a feature of Chinese

society, not of the steppe. Up to that time, the Yaolian were unique within the Khitan nation in possessing a clan surname. Later, in the 930s, Abaoji's clan began to use the surname Yelü. In keeping with Khitan elite custom, they had long taken their wives exclusively from another clan of their tribe, and at the same time that consort clan began to use the surname Xiao. From the Yelü and Xiao lineages came the royal family and its royal consorts until the end of the Liao dynasty.

The clan that was to adopt the Xiao surname appears to have been of mixed Khitan and Uighur or possibly Xi blood; they had long played a large role as the Tang court's agents in defending Chinese interests north of the border. In addition to managing their China connection, and making use of it in the steppe, they also played a prominent role in tribal affairs to the west, across the crest of the Greater Khingan Mountains. Abaoji's own clan of Yila tribal chieftains also were deeply involved with China, but with an interest in the south. The particular focus of their struggle with the Chinese was the contest to control the defense line that separated the Tang Military Governorships (*jiedushi*) in northeast China from the steppe powers. The Military Governor in northern Shanxi Province was Li Keyong, a partially sinified Shatuo Turk who also had been granted the title Prince of Jin (Jin meaning the region of Shanxi Province), along with the Tang imperial surname, Li, for military services to the Chinese throne in suppressing the great rebellions of the 870s. As a major player in Tang politics, Li Keyong found it useful to use that surname. He was one of the important warlords in the domestic power struggles that would end the Tang dynasty in 907. Possessing Shanxi, he controlled a bastion within the Tang government's northern defense line of passes and garrisons.⁴

In 905, foreseeing future possibilities, Abaoji led 70,000 of his cavalry in a dash into Datong, Li Keyong's base in northern Shanxi, to swear blood brotherhood in a steppe ritual of exchanging robes and mounts. At a moment when the Tang court threatened the Shatuo base, this act reinforced Li Keyong's hand; it also served as Abaoji's entering wedge into military affairs within China. The Yila tribe was poised to take more aggressive actions on the China front than was the Khitan's Yaolian Great Khan.

In 903 Abaoji had been named the Yüyue, the commander of all the Khitan nation's military forces, second only to the Yaolian Great Khan himself. Early in 907 Abaoji appeared at the triennial council of tribal chieftains to demand that he be acknowledged the new Great Khan (more properly, *khaghan*, "khan of khans"). To thus displace the Khitan nation's leader was a bold step, but he succeeded in winning the support of the other seven tribal chieftains. Since becoming the Yila chieftain in 901 he had repeatedly raided the China border, capturing cities and taking captives. To the east he had attacked the Jurchens and also taken captives, and through a combination of force and wise diplomacy he had established military superiority over the powerful Xi and Shiwei nomadic confederations in the steppe to the west. Thus, by campaigning and working tirelessly, within a few short years he had established his image as an aggressive new leader on all fronts. With

his successes, the Khitans appeared to have a new destiny. The two clans, Abaoji's and his consort's, between them controlled the powerful Yila tribe. Prestige, resources, accomplishment, and force allowed him to prevail in the council of the Eight Tribes' leaders. He challenged the Yaolian, overawed the council, and even obtained the concurrence of the last Yaolian Great Khan himself. Although Abaoji's action had an element of usurpation, it conformed with tribal custom and steppe expectations; it foreshadows the great council or *khuriltai* of 1206, at which Chinggis Khan forced his selection as Supreme Khan of the Mongol nation.

In May of the year 907, down in the North China Plain, the Chinese warlord Zhu Wen, who controlled North China and had murdered the last legitimate Tang ruler in 904 in order to enthrone one of that emperor's young children, now removed his puppet and declared himself the founding emperor of a new Chinese dynasty, called the Later Liang (see Chapter 1, Section II). Zhu's dynasty was short-lived, but it began the succession of short dynasties making up the period of the Five Dynasties that held power in North China for half a century from 907 until 960. Central and South China temporarily went their own way, fragmented into small states. Zhu Wen's usurpation of Tang state power in 907, and Abaoji's takeover of Khitan leadership in 907, each marking significant realignments of power, changed the shape of East Asian history. For one example, China's capital moved eastward from Chang'an to Bian (modern Kaifeng); the Inner Asian pressures on China also shifted from the northwest to the northeast. Moreover, it is of great interest that the middle three of the Five Dynasties were founded in China by remnants of the Shatuo Turks who had been settled inside China's northern boundaries as border zone warlords, and the third of the Five (the Later Jin dynasty created in 936) would be a client state of the Khitans. The reorganized Khitan nation was poised to take a strong hand in Chinese history at a most opportune time.

In light of steppe history, Abaoji's success in becoming the new Great Khan is not difficult to understand. Much more difficult to explain is why, having achieved the position of supreme leader within a strong and warlike nomad nation, he was not content to build an empire of and within the steppe region and thereby also within the expectations of steppe peoples. Instead, he immediately set about transforming the Khitan Grand Khanate, the instrument of rule that he had just gained, into something without precedent in steppe history. He attached a foreign administrative system to the Khitan nomadic state. His was to be a dual empire, part sedentary and part nomad, one part adapting to Chinese modes of governing and the other part remaining true to steppe tradition. The Khitan elite were expected to function in both halves: many became culturally dual in order actually to function and not merely play figurehead roles.

Two pyramids of administrative power were set up side by side, each capped by Abaoji, who served as Khitan Great Khan in the one and as Khitan emperor on the Chinese model in the other. One was a military state composed of the Khitan nation and other directly or indirectly administered tribal

groups on the steppe and in Manchuria, presided over by the Northern Chancellery. The other was a civil government administered by sedentary society's (principally Chinese society's) traditional means along the Chinese and Korean borders where conquered farming peoples lived, and was presided over by the Southern Chancellery. The Northern Chancellery managed all military and tribal matters and dealt with tribute from subordinate peoples. The Southern Chancellery engaged in civil governing and focused on collecting agrarian and commercial taxes from non-Khitans. The new government of dual institutions was a brilliant concept. Moreover, in actual practice it functioned with stability for more than two centuries. In 947 the dynastic name Liao, or "The Great Liao," was adopted, in the Chinese manner of naming, and of claiming to be an imperial dynasty; here I shall apply that dynastic name to the entire period starting in 907, as is done in the Chinese records.

However brilliant his achievement might seem in the light of history, Abaoji's new form of the state did not win universal approval from the Khitan tribal nobility of his time. They saw that their interests would be adversely affected. The ordinary tribesmen remained apart from cultural and political affairs of state; we have no way of knowing whether they welcomed, resented, or were indifferent to the new forms of governing. But Abaoji's vision of the stronger and more centralized state that was needed to direct his new system of dual administration required him to transform the Grand Khanate into an institution modeled on the powerful imperial administration of Tang China. That Chinese structure of highly centralized bureaucratic institutions supported by the entire social system with its intellectual and ethical foundations was scarcely within the ken of the Inner Asian observers. To those Khitans close to Abaoji, however, the Chinese emperor's ability to display an unassailable imperial majesty by itself seemed to explain the stability and enduring power of China. Abaoji saw value in that for steppe society, above all for himself as the ruler, and wanted to introduce that kind of strength into his government. Throughout his lifetime much of the tribal nobility opposed his pursuit of emperorship, for that imperial system limited their political roles. In theory, conciliar "election" made all males of the Great Khan's clan eligible for supreme leadership. It also gave leaders in other clans the potential for someday displacing the Great Khan, as Abaoji had done, by proving their individual capacity for leadership. That institutional fluidity was to be superseded by lifelong reigns that would occur in a fixed succession, determined by primogeniture, with a Chinese-style emphasis on family and inheritance. Stability in the ruling institution, they could see, would be gained at the expense of would-be military leaders' ambitions. The underlying ethos of tribal society would be weakened.

Throughout the nine years after 907, Abaoji was beset by serious rebellions, most often led by his own brothers and cousins, who felt that their prerogatives had been preempted and who could easily convince members of other tribes and clans that their opportunities had been diminished. Abaoji sought to convince the Khitan nobility that the new system would bring them differ-

ent but commensurate rewards. Finally, in 916 he adopted Chinese court ritual formalities that elevated his position even more. He arranged for 200 trusted courtiers to petition him to assume the title of Celestial Emperor and proclaim a Chinese-style reign-period name, thereby imitating the Chinese calendar with its implications of universal sovereignty. He named his eldest son by his principal consort his heir apparent and demanded a display of fealty to him from the entire nobility. And, after 918, his government occupied a newly built walled capital city with broad avenues oriented to the compass points and many large temple compounds. It had a grand park for the imperial tents where the palaces of a Chinese capital would be. Adjoining the city to the south was a second walled "Chinese city" (Han-cheng) with commercial quarters, artisans' shops, and warehouses. The urban population was largely made up of captured people, many of them Chinese, although there was a Uighur quarter and another for residences of diplomats. The imposing new capital was an amenity the Khitans had previously done without, and may not have liked, but its usefulness as a base of wealth and provider of special services was not entirely lost on the Khitan nobility.

Despite Abaoji's new imperial status, he could not behave like a Chinese emperor. In the manner of steppe rulers, he repeatedly forgave the rebels, especially close relatives, and judiciously assigned them posts in the new bureaucracy. It was not an expression of magnanimity; he could be a ruthlessly clear-minded opponent in a struggle. But in matters like this he still had to acknowledge rights of dissenters as defined by tribal custom. His flexibility and skill in enhancing his real bases of power while responding effectively to the many challenges from within gradually allowed his course to prevail.

The new capital, called Shangjing (Supreme Capital) was built at a site hallowed by Khitan legend, near the headwaters of the Shira Muren River, which runs eastward to join the Liao River of central Manchuria. It was one of five capitals eventually established, one for each of the five administrative circuits making up the extended Khitan empire. He also fostered the building of thirty or more small walled cities, or Chinese cities, so called because their inhabitants were largely captured Chinese.⁵ They were forced to manufacture salt, smelt and work iron, farm, manufacture many kinds of products, and make the cities into centers of commerce. The Supreme Capital was designed by a Chinese adviser and built with captive Chinese labor. The Eastern Capital was built at the site of modern Liaoyang City in central Manchuria. The Central Capital was built about a hundred miles south of the Supreme Capital, at the site of the newly absorbed Xi tribal people's old ritual center. A century later an imposing new Central Capital city was built there. After 936, as a broad zone 70 to 100 miles wide, lying across the northern boundary of China (the "Sixteen Prefectures" ceded that year), was absorbed into the Liao empire, a Western Capital was created, utilizing the old Chinese fortress city of Datong in northern Shanxi. A new Southern Capital was built at Yan, the site of modern Beijing. Within this populous southern sedentary zone of the Liao state, the preexisting counties and prefectures were taken over and retained in the Chinese pattern of local administration.

The entire administration of the Khitan empire was headed by two prime ministers, one appointed from the Xiao consort clan to head the Northern Chancellery, and one appointed from the Yelü clan to head the Southern Chancellery. The central government had six ministries—for personnel, revenues, rites, war, justice, and works, on the Tang dynasty Chinese model—and many high officials in the Southern Chancellery were appointed from the subject Chinese, Bohai, and Korean populations, all long familiar with the paperwork of Chinese government. Bureaucratic administration on the Chinese model came to be a central component of the Liao state. It even infiltrated the traditional tribal structure of governing among the Khitans and their subject tribal peoples.⁶

V. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KHITAN ACCULTURATION

Chinese historians always point to these developments as evidence of "sinification," and in a limited and formal sense, they are correct. These were indeed adaptations of Chinese governing techniques, necessitated by the practical requirements of administering sedentary captive populations. But if sinification implies surrender to the superior Chinese culture, one might better use the term "acculturation" to describe this broadening of the cultural models taken over by the Khitans. One should explain Abaoji's measures simply as a realistic, proven means of managing those sources of wealth and power provided by the sedentary sector of his population: they were administrative adaptations to problems of efficient exploitation. We cannot assume that they represented a shift of values, a Khitan acknowledgment of inferiority before China's cultural greatness. No such shift is seen in Abaoji or the nobles of his and the next generation, although there are some individual examples of acculturated Khitan nobles who became devotees of things Chinese. More of those did indeed appear in later Liao history, but even then it did not signify a rejection of "Khitanness," or a significant loss of the solid ground on which adherence to their Khitan cultural heritage rested. The culturally dual Khitan elite, competent in both (and in some cases also in other) cultures, to the end remained Khitan at heart.

Abaoji himself almost certainly spoke Chinese. Yet he kept a certain distance from Chinese cultural influences and stressed Khitan distinctiveness. In 920, wanting for his people the powerful tool of a writing system, he ordered the adoption of a newly devised script. This Khitan "large script," which today's scholars have not yet fully deciphered, looks to an outsider like Chinese, but it was totally unintelligible to the Chinese. It utilizes brush strokes shaped like those that compose Chinese characters, but they form word graphs that arbitrarily add to or reduce or otherwise vary the strokes of the counterpart Chinese characters. The resulting script may have been found clumsy from the beginning. In 925 Abaoji's younger brother Diela appears to have played the essential role in devising a new script. The *Liao History* states: "An Uighur delegation arrived, and there was no one who could understand their language. The Empress said to Emperor Taizu [Abaoji]: 'Diela,

who is very intelligent, could be assigned to serve.' He was sent to accompany the delegation. After spending twenty days in their company he had learned their speech and their writing, following which he devised the Khitan small script, which has fewer characters yet is comprehensive."⁷ The "small script" for Khitan is assumed to incorporate phonetic writing principles, even though its script still looks like Chinese and not like any of the Semitic scripts from which Uighur phonetic writing was derived.⁸ Diela lived up to his reputation for being mentally quick, but it is also evident that while Khitan and Uighur were not mutually intelligible, the distance between them was not great.

The adoption of the second Khitan script was quickly approved. The intention in adopting these scripts, as with the adaptation of the Chinese imperial institution and other elements of Chinese civilization to Khitan needs, was to give the Khitans an advanced social management tool, but without surrendering to sinification by simply taking over the Chinese writing system (along with its classical grammar and literary forms), as the Koreans and the Japanese had done. Khitans would learn to write, but in their own way; Chinese would not be able to read what Khitans wrote without learning their language, and very few Chinese did.

Nonetheless, whatever their intention, Chinese language and writing also were used in administering the Southern Chancellery, and many Khitans of the official elite had to become totally fluent in its use. While the Khitan scripts were prominently used for memorial inscriptions on stone and wood, and for record keeping in the Northern Chancellery, almost no extensive documents written in them have been preserved, and it may well be that few were ever produced.⁹ Literate members of the Khitan elite found that they had much to gain by using Chinese; it gave them access to a massive body of writings on all subjects. Inevitably, their elite produced many individuals who became literate, as well as some who were highly learned and who came genuinely to value aspects of Chinese civilization. We need not assume that implied disloyalty to their own Khitan civilization. Rather, through their learning they might experience exhilaration at participating in a broader realm of ideas and values and aesthetic experience.

To cite one particularly important example, many Inner Asian peoples converted to Buddhism, as had the Khitans by the tenth century. For all of them, Chinese translations of the scriptures were the instrument by which they penetrated the teachings of the Lord Buddha. Chinese was not the original language of the Buddha, nor was Buddhism the cultural export of which the Chinese were the most proud. Inner Asians as well as others, being aware of that fact, were if anything the more willing to accept Chinese high culture as a universal vehicle insofar as it was the instrument for gaining access to Buddhism. The Chinese of course thought of Chinese civilization as the world's only high civilization, hence as the universal cultural system. The non-Chinese peoples such as the Khitans who lived within China's orbit also could see Chinese language and learning as in a sense a universal cultural tool without necessarily granting to Chinese values the emotional commitment that Chinese have taken for granted. This subtle difference between acculturation and

sinification is one that Chinese today still may not always appreciate. It has parallels in other cases of intercultural relations.

Most important, however, is the simple fact that literacy, whether in Chinese or in the Khitan script, made bureaucratic government possible. It regularized the modes of communication within government and permitted systematic record keeping for administrative purposes. Khitan leaders even before the time of Abaoji had recognized that Silla, the most powerful of the Korean states until its fall in 935, had thoroughly adopted Chinese ways, from its script and its literary traditions to the forms of its government. The kingdom of Bohai was founded about the year 700; thereafter its kings were invested by the Tang court with which it maintained diplomatic relations for more than 200 years. Imitating both Silla and China, Bohai too had created a strongly centralized government on the Chinese model. Although its population was primarily sedentary, it was militarily powerful, at times a threat to Tang China. It was clear to their Khitan counterparts that the Bohai kings and their ruling elite benefited greatly from their cultural borrowing without having surrendered to Chinese domination. Abaoji's sons learned Chinese, at least one of them exceedingly well; their father did not expect them to become less Khitan thereby, although, as we shall see, their mother and others had their doubts about the consequences of deep immersion in Chinese literary culture.

VI. ABAOJI RECEIVES YAO KUN, ENVOY OF THE LATER TANG DYNASTY

Abaoji's own feelings about the Chinese language and about China are revealed in a fascinating conversation he had with a Chinese named Yao Kun who came to him as ambassador from the Later Tang court in 926. The Later Tang, second of the brief Five Dynasties, had been founded in 923 by the son¹⁰ of Li Keyong, the Shatuo Turk warlord of northern Shanxi with whom Abaoji had sworn binding brotherhood in 905. Despite that background, relations between the Shatuo and Khitan states gradually cooled. In 922 and 923 Abaoji had campaigned deep into Hebei, looting cities and taking captives among the Chinese population, and had thus been at war with the Later Tang. Yao, the Chinese ambassador sent by that Turkic Chinese state, carried a diplomatic communication to the Khitan ruler. He went first to the Supreme Capital, where he found the entire court had gone with the armies east into Manchuria. He therefore followed them and late in the summer met Abaoji on campaign, where he had just completed the conquest of the Bohai. The Khitan court was camped at Fuyu, an important Bohai city in what would be present-day Jilin Province in China's Northeast. The ambassador had come to make formal announcement of the Later Tang emperor's death and the accession, by dubious means, of his adopted son. Abaoji, of course, had already heard the news and knew all about the background, for the Shatuo Later Tang dynasty was of the greatest strategic importance to him in his further plans to conquer portions of North China. But the courtesy of a diplo-

matic announcement was demanded by the elaborate Chinese protocol then observed by all states, even non-Chinese states recently at war with one another. The ambassador's reassembled aide-mémoire preserves the only near-firsthand depiction of Abaoji which offers more than a few scattered phrases.

When Emperor Zhuangzong [of the Later Tang] died [in the spring of 926, his successor] Emperor Mingzong dispatched his Palace Attendant, Yao Kun, to report the late ruler's death to the Khitan state. Yao arrived at Xilou [a fortress adjacent to the Khitan capital] to find that Abaoji was leading a campaign in the east against the Bohai. Yao followed on, meeting up at Shenzhou [near the newly conquered Bohai capital].

[Yao:] After arriving, I was granted an audience. Abaoji invited me into his great tent. Abaoji was nine *chi* tall [very tall!]. He was wearing a long gown of brocade with a wide sash tied at the back. He and his consort sat on facing couches. I was led forth and presented. Before I could deliver my message, Abaoji [mockingly] asked: "I have heard that in your Chinese land you now have one Son of Heaven in Henan and another in Hebei; is that true?" I answered: "The Son of Heaven in Henan died on the first day of the fourth month of this year, in a military uprising at Luoyang. I have come here to bear those woeful tidings. The Regional Commander in Hebei, our Lord General, on command of the late emperor, was just then in the field to suppress a military uprising at Weizhou. By the time he heard of the disaster at court, the loyalties of the armies were wavering, and when he reached the capital it was leaderless. Higher and lower, all insistently petitioned our Lord General to assume charge over the state. Now, in response to the hopes of the people, he has ascended the throne and become the Emperor [Mingzong].

Abaoji uttered a wail of grief, then speaking through his flowing tears he said: "I swore brotherhood with the father of that Lord of Hedong Province; that Son of Heaven in Henan was my son, as the son of my dear friend. Of late I have heard that there were military uprisings in China, and I called up fifty thousand of my armored cavalry intending to go to Luoyang to rescue my son. But at that time I was engaged in Bohai which still had not fallen. That my son should have come to such an end! It is so unjust!" He wept uncontrollably. Then he said to me: "When the present Son of Heaven in China [the new emperor] first heard there were troubles in Luoyang, why did he not rush to the rescue instead of allowing things to come to this pass?"

I replied: "There was no lack of a sense of extreme urgency, but distance and intervening obstructions held him back until it was too late.

Abaoji then spoke again: "When my son died, they should have consulted me. How could the new Son of Heaven just put himself on the throne?" I replied: "My emperor has commanded armies for twenty years and reached the position of Chief Regional Commander. His armies numbered three hundred thousand crack troops. All of them, as with one mind, firmly

supported his elevation. If he had removed himself, disaster would have ensued immediately. It is not as if he had not received knowledge of your Majesty's intentions, but what was he to do about the wishes of the people?"

His [Abaoji's] son Tuyu [i.e., Prince Bei], at one side, spoke: "The envoy need not say more. 'He led his ox through another man's field, and the ox was taken from him.' Is that not excessive? [Prince Bei rebukes the envoy by citing an incident from the ancient Chinese *Commentary of Zuo*, where it is told that when a man allowed his ox to damage a neighbor's field, another man who assisted in removing the troublesome ox then seized and kept it, profiting excessively from his good deed. This displays Prince Bei's unexpected command of the Chinese classics. See Legge 1960, 5:310.]

I replied: "'Responding to Heaven and maintaining accord with mankind'—how can that be compared with the petty affairs of some ordinary fellow? For example, when your Majesty gained your rule over your state, and then would not be subject to displacement by some other claimant, could that be called taking the throne by force?" [The Chinese envoy peremptorily rejects the prince's use of an obscure Chinese allusion, and then rather courageously compares his emperor's dubious accession to the new norms Abaoji had imposed on the Khitan rulership.] Abaoji immediately reassured and supported me, saying: "That exactly expresses in a most appropriate fashion the principles involved." Then he went on to say: "That my son in China had come to such troubles, I already knew. But I had heard reports that this son kept two thousand women in his palace, and a thousand musicians, that he spent his days hawking and running his hunting hounds, that he was wallowing in drink and sex; he had no concern for his people, he appointed unworthy men; all this had reached the point where the whole realm was enraged. Since hearing these things, I have been deeply concerned that he might be overthrown. A month ago someone came with news informing me that my son had met calamity. From that time my entire household has given up wines, has turned loose all its hawks and hounds, and has dismissed the court musicians. Throughout all my tribes I too have a thousand households of musicians, but I use them only for banquets of state; I do not dare make inappropriate use of them. If my conduct were to become like that of my son, I too no doubt would be unable to last long. I expect from this time forward to look upon him as a warning to us."

Abaoji again asked: "I have heard that the Chinese ruler has wrested control over Western Sichuan. Is that true?" I answered: "In the ninth month of last year troops were sent forth, and by the eleventh month they had gained control over both Eastern and Western Sichuan, capturing two hundred thousand soldiers and horses, and gold and silk beyond counting. The [new] emperor having just ascended the throne, he has not yet had time to send any of that to you [in tribute], but he will surely dispatch envoys for that purpose." Pleased, Abaoji questioned further: "I have heard that in Western Sichuan there are the perilous precipice roads; how can

troops and horses get through?" I answered: "Although the routes to Sichuan are indeed perilous, after our late ruler had taken control over Henan, he possessed four hundred thousand crack troops and one hundred thousand cavalry. There was no place where he could not advance, and he looked upon traversing the precipice roads as if crossing flat land!"

Abaoji then went on to say: "I can speak Chinese, but I never speak it in the presence of my tribal people. I fear that they may emulate the Chinese and grow soft and timid." And he said further: "My son in China, although having the son-to-father relationship with me, nonetheless was at times in a relationship of enmity with me. We even developed an intense mutual hatred. But I hold no resentment against your present Son of Heaven, so we may well be able to enjoy friendly relations. You must now report back, and must say that I intend to continue to lead my generals and tens of thousands of cavalry to the south, even beyond Youzhou and Zhenzhou [i.e., beyond present-day Beijing and on into central Hebei]. I shall then make a face-to-face compact with your sovereign. I demand Hebei and Youzhou. If my Chinese son will take charge of arranging this, I will have no cause ever to invade China again."

I replied: "That is a matter beyond my competence to deal with." The Khitan ruler was enraged. He put me in prison. After something more than ten days' time, he again summoned me before him and said: "It probably would be quite difficult to get all of Hebei Province, but if I can have just Zhenzhou and Youzhou that also would suffice!" He had paper and writing brushes set before me and ordered me to prepare an account of all this. I said I could not do that. He wanted to have me killed, but [his trusted Chinese adviser] Han Yanhui remonstrated against that. Therefore he sent me back to prison.

Abaoji fell sick with typhoid fever. One evening a large star fell directly in front of his tent. Abruptly thereafter he died at Fuyu [the former Bohai capital city] on the twenty-seventh day of the seventh lunar month of the first year of the Tiancheng reign period [September 6, 926]. His consort, the Empress of the Shuyu clan, personally led the armies to escort his funeral cortege back to Xilou. I accompanied them, and after arrival there was released, and so returned.¹¹

Abaoji was fifty-four years old. He had just completed the conquest of the powerful Bohai state, enthralling its captured royal family as Khitan nobles and absorbing its territories and people into the Khitan empire. He had extended the Khitan boundaries east to the Yalu and Ussuri rivers. He had also enlarged them westward deep into the Mongolian plateau, and he had thoroughly studied the problems of extending them southward into China. Confident in the momentum his armies had achieved, he sought to exert diplomatic pressure to achieve his next goal. Yao Kun's report on his embassy, providing firsthand observations of the Khitan ruler's mentality, is a rare document. We see Abaoji's quick mind comprehending far more than needs to be spoken. He is capable of anger and of intimidation. But we also

see a breadth of spirit and expressions of emotions ranging from ritual grief to genuine nostalgia, from shrewd badgering to calm reflections on the real state of affairs. And we observe that he could understand the constraints under which others must act, and his willingness to let bygones be bygones. This encounter offers us a fascinating window into his agile mind. No founder of a subsequent conquest dynasty possessed his command of Chinese conditions or his ability to respond so knowingly in a diplomatic encounter.

This strong man stretched the capacities of the Khitan nation even more than he extended its territorial boundaries. He launched his people on a course that forced them to undertake great things. To be sure, it can be argued that his course led two centuries later to their destruction as a dynastic empire. But had his descendants at that later time included another man of his stature, the Liao dynasty might well have taken a different course.



BUILDING THE LIAO EMPIRE

The Khitan state quickly became a vast empire ruling not only over a narrow band of Chinese and other sedentary peoples living along its southern borders but also over dozens of other nomadic and semi-sedentary tribal peoples on its other three borders. Maintaining control required both constant military action and skillful use of diplomacy. Domestically, deeply ingrained Khitan tribal customs repeatedly caused succession crises; they reveal much to us about the processes of social change. Diplomatically, the Liao dynasty's treaty settlements with China opened an unprecedented era in East Asian interstate relations, while its geographic position gave it an important intermediary role in those relations.

I. SUCCESSION ISSUES AFTER ABAOJI

Abaoji's death in 926 was sudden and unexpected; he was only fifty-four years old. In 916 he had named his eldest son, Prince Bei, his successor, invoking the principle of primogeniture borrowed from the Chinese social system but alien to the steppe. Was he confident that Prince Bei would succeed him? Bei had accompanied his parents on the campaign against the Bohai nation, and following the victory late in the summer of 926, Abaoji named him Prince of Dongdan, that being the new name given to the conquered Bohai territories; the principality of Dongdan became the eastern circuit of the Khitan realm. Bei was a mature man of twenty-six in a society that considered males to be adults at age fifteen. He was fully capable, we might well think, of carrying on as head of the Khitan state whether that role was defined in Khitan or in Chinese terms. But the hope that an uneventful succession would follow did not take his formidable mother into account. Nor did it estimate correctly the continuing force of traditional Khitan values, which fueled succession crises repeatedly thereafter.

Abaoji's widow is known in the Chinese records as the Empress Yingtian,

her posthumous temple name. Few women in history match her independence and determination. We read that she escorted Abaoji's body back to the capital, took over the conduct of both civil and military affairs, and directed the funeral arrangements, assuming full executive powers. A Chinese empress dowager often would assume the role of regent for a young heir because her generational superiority within the imperial clan gave her some authority in clan matters. But no matter how intelligent or well informed, she would "listen from behind a screen" and would defer to ministers of the court or male family members to act for her.

Not so this Khitan empress; we have seen that she accompanied her husband on the campaign against the Bohai and joined him in the audience to receive the ambassador from the Later Tang court. Khitan women, at least those of the elite about whom we know something, were full partners with their menfolk in many things; but even among Khitan women, the Empress Yingtian was exceptional for her strong will, energy, ruthlessness, and martial spirit. Abaoji had been volatile, adaptive, committed to far-reaching cultural change. She, by contrast, was the quintessential Khitan, not only the indomitable virago in her own personality but also the embodiment of conservative tribal values that resisted change. Equally strong-willed and manipulative imperial women were not unknown in Chinese history, but their style had to be quite different. It was inconceivable to the Chinese that a woman could so openly assert herself as the equal of her male relatives; to them such behavior constituted a perverse inversion of the natural order. This strong woman directly took command, whether to lead a campaign at the head of her own units in the armed forces or to impose her will on the councils of state. Many of her own people undoubtedly feared her and sought to limit her powers.

Even so strong a woman as the Empress Yingtian, in many ways the full partner with her husband in ruling, was nonetheless expected to sacrifice herself upon his death. The story is told that when the funeral rites were under way, a Chinese officer at court suggested that she might follow steppe custom and be buried alongside her dead husband. She parried by noting that the officer himself, long in intimate service to the fallen ruler, in all decency might better do that. The ancient Chinese had put aside that custom well over a thousand years earlier, but as the Chinese officer knew, hundreds of Khitan warriors and companions were to be sacrificed and buried with the late emperor. Feeling trapped, he nonetheless bravely replied that in terms of intimacy with the late ruler no one equaled the empress herself, and that if she would go, he would also join those to be entombed. She responded: "I of course do not refuse to join the Emperor underground, but my children are young and the country has no leader, so I am not free to do that."¹ In a gesture to custom, however, she offered her right arm to be cut off and placed in the imperial coffin; when the Khitan nobles protested that such a sacrifice was excessive, she nonetheless had her right hand severed at the wrist to represent her in her husband's mausoleum. By that daunting maneuver she silenced critics and enhanced her powers.

Prince Bei (in his mid-twenties), and his two younger brothers (in their early

twenties), were by no means so young that they were still dependent on a mother's guidance. Bei, however, was suspect in her eyes. She was determined to intervene in the succession process and overturn her dead husband's pre-script. Her concern was that Prince Bei was culturally dual, addicted to Chinese learning, and therefore in her eyes sadly lacking in Khitan leadership qualities. She ignored the fact that her husband had struggled for two decades to establish stable Chinese principles of rulership and succession. On naming his then seventeen-year-old eldest son his heir in 916, as if anticipating future resistance, Abaoji had demanded that all the Khitan nobles proclaim their loyalty to the prince. That was a radical step. The empress shared the more traditional tribal attitudes. Her second son, called Deguang, and known in history as the Emperor Taizong, was twenty-four in 926, but already had developed all the ideal qualities of the Khitan grand chieftain. Skilled at warfare, he had successfully led a number of campaigns against tribal enemies. Popular with the old nobility, he basked in his mother's favor. The force of circumstances was all too clear; Prince Bei volunteered that his younger brother's qualifications were superior to his own, in effect announcing that he would not contest his mother's decision to elevate him. Perhaps his compliant spirit proved that her judgment was correct. But was he perhaps playing for time? He was by no means a soft stranger to the military life; he too could ride and shoot with his Khitan princely peers, and had performed well at his father's side in distant campaigns, leading forward attack troops in battle. His fatal flaw was that he could function in both cultures. To be the equal of a Chinese courtier at that stage in Khitan history was to raise doubts about his leadership in the steppe. Abaoji had told the ambassador from China that he knew Chinese but would not speak it in the presence of his people lest they "emulate the Chinese and grow soft and timid." Prince Bei, in contrast, had led in persuading his father's government to accept Chinese institutions and rituals, such as the official veneration of Confucius as patron of the state. He wrote polished essays in both Khitan and Chinese and had even translated a book of ancient Chinese lore.

Forced to abdicate the throne, he nonetheless retained the title of Prince of Dongdan. Could he have been plotting to make that eastern region a base for rebellion? Under suspicion as a potential rival of his younger brother, Deguang, he was kept under surveillance for several years. Eventually, Bei wrote a mournful poem in Chinese accepting the fact that he lived in the shadow of a brother who loomed taller in the eyes of his people. Then in 930 he slipped away and entered China, to live there as a poet and painter. The Later Tang emperor Mingzong (Li Siyuan) received him as an honored guest; the imperial surname Li was bestowed on him together with the Chinese personal name Zanhua, meaning "to exalt China." Yet even in self-imposed exile he remained fiercely loyal to the Khitan cause. In 934 he sent intelligence reports to his brother about conditions in North China urging the Khitans to invade.

Poems and a few of his paintings remain; they display great skill in depicting the mounted hunters and warriors of the steppe and reveal his nostalgia for Khitan life. Prince Bei is an intriguing figure, in some ways one who attracts

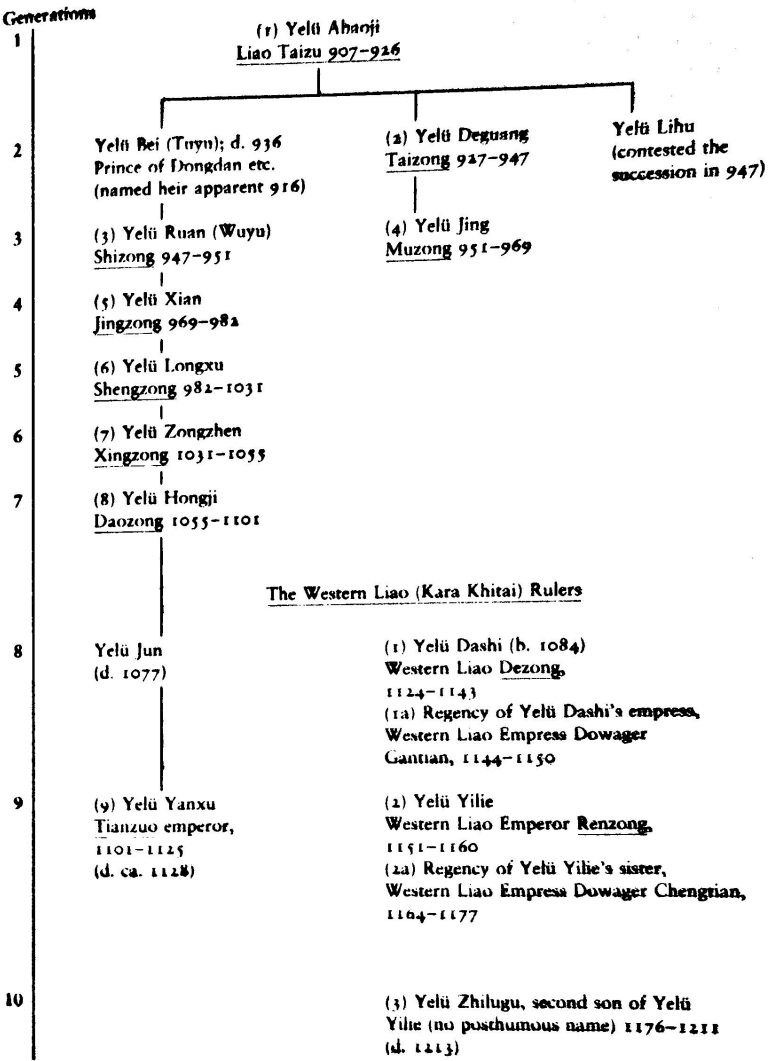
our sympathies. Yet he was a moody man, on the one hand drawn to books and learning, on the other a man who inflicted violence and petty cruelties on his wives, concubines, and attendants. Unavoidably involved in factional politics at the court in China, he was assassinated there in 936, on orders of the last Later Tang ruler, who felt betrayed by the Khitan invasion that year.² Nevertheless, his eldest son, a child of eight when left behind in 926 to be reared by his uncle at the Khitan court, known by his Khitan name Wuyu, had become the model Khitan prince. His uncle Deguang, the Emperor Taizong, is said to have loved him as his own son. He accompanied the emperor on the campaign into China in 947 and was with him when the emperor died in North China on the return from that campaign. The respected position he had achieved in Taizong's entourage made it possible for him to claim the succession, which he did with the support of the army leaders, while escorting the imperial coffin back to the Supreme Capital. He is known in history as the Emperor Shizong.

On the death of her second son during the 947 campaign in China, Empress Dowager Yingtian again wished to name the successor. She denounced his heir, her grandson, this time in favor of her pampered third son, the violent and abhorrent Prince Lihu. She sent an army from the Supreme Capital to intercept the returning forces. In an initial skirmish her army was defeated. Civil war threatened. This time, however, the court failed to support her, though not because her grandson Shizong's claims (as the nephew and favored associate of the dead emperor) to be the legitimate successor were decisive in their minds, for no heir had been formally designated, and Deguang's eligible young sons were not even considered. To the Khitan nobility, Lihu's violent and untrustworthy character had been made all too evident, and thus he lost their support. The new Emperor Shizong, by contrast, was noted for his generosity as well as for being the ideal young martial leader.³ In this second succession crisis, twenty-one years after Abaoji's death, the principle he had struggled to institute, by which the eldest son should be guaranteed a secure succession, still did not prevail, and again the succession was seriously challenged. Traditional tribal leadership concepts were more meaningful.

After coming to the throne, Shizong quite understandably sent his troublesome grandmother and his uncle Lihu to live far from the capital. Lihu died in prison after several further attempts to rebel. The Empress Yingtian died in 953 at the advanced age of seventy-four.⁴ So ended her remarkable career; but the model of the activist (or, as the Chinese would say, the meddling) empress remained. One important consequence of her life was that the Khitan custom of sacrificing rulers' wives to be buried with them was thereafter abolished, owing to her repudiation of it in 926.

In the third succession in 951, after Emperor Shizong was killed by a rebellious nephew, the throne passed to Muzong, the son of Prince Bei's younger brother Deguang. The new emperor thus was Shizong's cousin, and so the succession passed to the collateral line in the same generation. Only when Muzong died in 969 did the succession again revert to Prince Bei's line, as Abaoji had intended, to remain there until the end of the dynasty (see Chart 1). It took a

CHART 1. THE LIAO IMPERIAL SUCCESSION



half-century of conflict and uncertainty to overcome Khitan tribal traditions; the principle of primogeniture that Abaoji had sought to institute as the new pattern of succession slowly began to prevail in the hybrid Liao imperial institutions. That it took so long and still remained subject to dispute reveals the tensions underlying the slow process of acculturation that marked early Liao institutional history.

II. THE MEANING OF THE EARLY LIAO SUCCESSION CRISES

As they created large empires needing stable political institutions, all tribal societies in Inner Asian history encountered disruptive succession problems. In the smaller scale of tribal organization, the very instability of leadership could be a source of strength. The individual whose exceptional military skills, clear-mindedness in decisions for short-range action, and charismatic personality won approval of the tribe, in short the "natural leader," would be elevated by acclamation of his peers. That is not quite the same as open "election," even though it is sometimes called that. When the leader lagged in performance, he could be replaced by a more effective successor without creating civil war. That system had great rationality so long as the scope of governing remained small enough for personalities to be the dominant factor.

Abaoji and other steppe leaders who knew China could only envy the profound reverence, loyalty, and obedience that the Chinese displayed toward their imperial throne. Khitan visitors had observed the great court audiences where all the military and civil leaders of the vast Chinese state and the assembled foreign envoys would render servile obeisance, almost without regard for the personal qualities of the ruler. His commands appeared to be unquestioningly obeyed. The observation of that spectacle at the Chinese court always impressed visitors.

At its best, of course, Chinese government embodied many other elements: cultural and institutional limitations on the power of the throne that were not apparent to Inner Asian visitors. A responsible civil bureaucracy, advised by military associates, in possession of systematically assembled information and observing powerful precedents, provided the Chinese throne with judgment and guidance. What appeared to be servile bureaucrats at the Chinese court were in fact self-assured officials carrying out political actions largely of their own making. The Chinese emperor was a despot limited by intricate cultural and bureaucratic restraints; in fact, he shared authority with his scholar-officialdom. It was difficult for the outsider to sense such complex interrelationships behind the pageantry. Yet he would have been correct in perceiving the strength of the Chinese imperial institution, particularly the stability that was provided by normally unchallenged tenure of reign and by predetermined succession. Among all the Inner Asian leaders in history, as they succeeded in building larger states, the only motive in opting for emperorship over the traditional tribal khanate was their desire to enlarge their powers, to increase their authority, and to centralize their governing. In striv-

ing for those understandable goals, the Chinese imperial institution and the experience of Inner Asian predecessors in adapting Chinese political forms provided the only alternative model available to the great khans of tribal confederations.

Incongruities lay hidden in the adaptations of Chinese institutions to the structure of nomadic societies. Even the most ambitious and effective leaders such as Abaoji could not abruptly alter the mechanics of their tribal selection procedures or the expectations of their peers in the tribal elite; such change required corresponding adjustments in the structure of the tribal base. As I have argued, to function effectively, tribes needed active chieftains, not symbolic figureheads. The structure of their societies readily accommodated that need. Chinese society also provided outlets by which able individuals could achieve rewards and success, especially in its scholar-officialdom, but that volatile element was balanced against a stable system of imperial authority in which emperors, the supreme leaders once a new dynasty was founded, transcended the pressures of individual competition and selection. Ritually reinforced patterns of reverence for the emperor in the Chinese hierarchy could not just be borrowed and mechanically imposed alongside the personal authority actively commanded by a great chieftain.

The nomad khan's supremacy might be in some measure derived from his clan's status, but essentially it was earned by his individual displays of martial skills, character, and charisma. To Abaoji, who possessed those qualities in abundance, the radical step of borrowing the concept of primogeniture must have seemed the most direct way to strengthen his Khitan state system. But he proposed this solution only *after* he had attained the supreme position; otherwise he himself would not have been able to contest the Yaolian Great Khan in 907. Did tribal resistance to his changes ever arouse doubts in his mind?

Some historians have argued that Abaoji may have come to realize that his second son clearly possessed better qualifications for leadership than did the eldest, whom he had earlier named his successor. The second son had achieved a stronger base of military power, largely because he had so successfully performed the tasks that Abaoji had assigned to him. The tribal leaders liked and wanted him, as the Empress Yingtian clearly saw. However that may be, up to the moment of his untimely death, Abaoji made no move to demote his chosen heir. The empress and the tribal leaders did that after his unexpected death, and old tribal patterns prevailed. The eldest son, too, realized that he could not win. Like an unsuccessful, self-nominated rival in traditional tribal "elections," Prince Bei was not killed or deprived of his dignity and status, even though there may have been suspicions that he might use his princedom in Dongdan as a base from which to contest the throne. Although he left the scene and went to China, where his cultural achievement opened up to him an interesting, perhaps comforting, alternative, he did not flee in fear of his life. His "abdication" under adversity and his continuing demonstration of loyalty to his dynasty demonstrated his "Khitanness," but also made him a model of Confucian virtue to later Chinese historians. Their

comments in the official *Liao History*, written 400 years later, compare him to the upright heir of a debased regime in Chinese antiquity, and they add that Prince Bei's loyalty and virtue were rewarded when his heirs eventually came to the throne. Their rather quaint comments show no understanding of the real circumstances surrounding this succession crisis.⁵ When Prince Bei's younger brother, Emperor Taizong, suddenly and unexpectedly died in 947, the succession principles were still being contested. The empress dowager again asserted herself to act as regent. She denounced the new emperor's father, Prince Bei, as a turncoat, and undoubtedly reflected a segment of tribal opinion when she declared that the father's deficiencies made his son unacceptable. She attempted to promote her third son, Lihu, but instead it was Shizong who had gained power and prestige as a military commander and an intimate associate of his uncle, the emperor. That enabled him to be declared the successor.

By this time, conditions had changed somewhat; after coming to the throne, each of the early Liao emperors could see that his security was enhanced by undermining the old system and supporting the new one. As the Emperor Shizong, Bei's son had to banish his grandmother and uncle and purge the elite of potential dissidents. True, rebellions against his rule occurred frequently, and finally he was murdered by a nephew at the head of a faction within the imperial clan that did not accept him or the new pattern. Struggles among dissident factions continued for several years and reappeared during subsequent successions. What had changed was that the cost of contesting the succession had gone up as the rigid Chinese concept gradually displaced the more flexible and accommodating tribal traditions. An ambitious tribal leader who contested the succession now was no longer seen as a legitimate rival: he was a rebel.

The succession issue continued to plague the dynasty to the very end; the basic incongruity between Chinese principles and Khitan social realities remained unresolved. Although primogeniture gave a prospective Liao heir apparent an increasingly strong claim on the succession, it never guaranteed success. The struggles surrounding contested successions became more blood-thirsty because the old process of verifying a new leader by acclamation had been displaced. Instead of being openly accepted as participants in a legitimate selection process, as in the past, rivals were forced into what became, under the new definitions, criminal behavior and desperate acts, often leading to disgrace and death. As we shall see, analogous problems afflicted the imperial successions of later steppe conquerors as well.

III. THE KHITANS' INNER ASIAN TRIBAL EMPIRE

Tribes were the basic building blocks of Inner Asian politics. Amalgamating tribes into confederations of ever larger scope was the typical process of steppe politics. Abaoji inherited the leadership of a Khitan confederation that had existed in relative stability for almost two centuries under the leadership of the Yaolian Great Khans. In the steppe, however, stability was tantamount

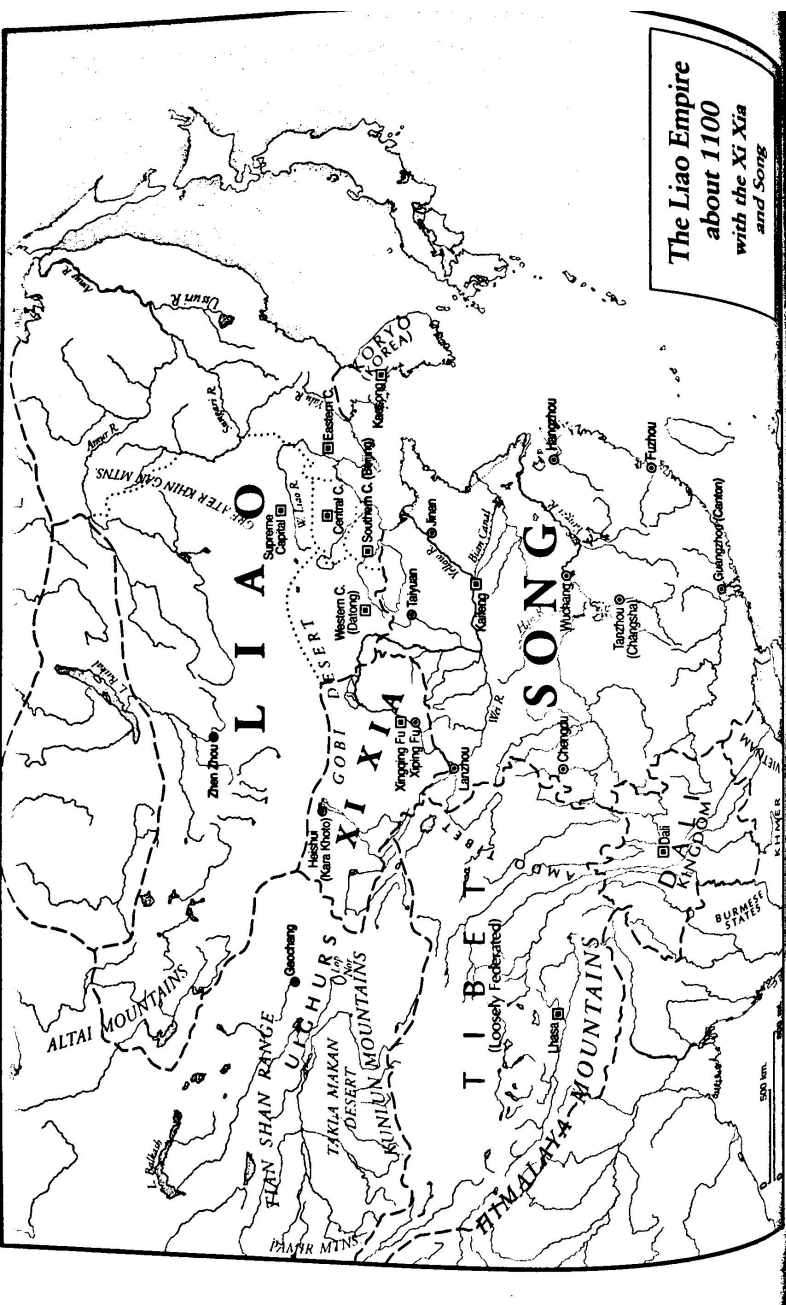
Building the Liao Empire

to decline; Abaoji was able to wrest leadership from the Yaolian by showing that he could again set the Khitan nation on the road to aggressive expansion. He not only did that with rapid and brilliant success, but also left to his successors the obligation to continue expansion by force, by guile, and by all other means. Throughout the tenth century, most of the Liao rulers exhausted themselves in the restless pursuit of empire.⁶ The pace of Khitan aggression slowed somewhat by the mid-eleventh century, but the need to campaign on the frontiers in order to keep neighboring tribes subservient persisted to the end of the dynasty. Liao relations with China, Korea, and the Xi Xia state assumed a more stable pattern during the early eleventh century, but on the boundaries to the north and northwest, when we piece together the Inner Asian history of the Liao from the Chinese records, the fact of incessant campaigning against the empire's tribal components becomes very clear.

The Liao empire forcefully established its presence as a great power in Inner Asia early in the tenth century. Abaoji led campaigns to the west in 916 and again in 924; in the second of those he crossed the "flowing sands" of the Gobi Desert to reach the former capital of the Uighurs on the Orkhon River (far north in present-day Mongolia). The histories say that along the way he subdued the Dangxiang (i.e., the Tanguts), the Tuhun (or Tuyuhun, in modern Gansu Province), and other, mostly Turkic tribes and nations. Vigorous expansion in the north and west continued for a century, as needs and opportunities arose.

The general pattern can be seen in the example offered by Liao relations with the Zubu nation, also called the Dada (Tatars). They had commenced offering tribute to the Khitans after Abaoji displayed the might of his cavalry in his great northern campaign of 924. The Liao emperor Shengzong, who reigned from 982 to 1031, was forced to lead an expeditionary campaign against them in 983. For a decade thereafter they remained turbulent; first they killed their own khan, and then his successors defied the Liao, until the reigning khan surrendered to the Liao in 1003. The Liao decided to impose stricter controls by separating them into several divisions, each under a Liao military governor. They revolted again in 1026 but were again suppressed and forced this time to pay an increased annual tribute of horses, camels, and thousands of furs. After 1026 they continued to revolt and for a time evaded strict Liao control, growing ever stronger. We know little of them for some decades, but by the 1090s they were invading the Liao empire's northeastern border. In 1100 the Liao forces crushed them in a great battle in which the Zubu khan was taken prisoner; the Khitans took him back to their Supreme Capital and allowed mobs in the market place to hack him to pieces. The battle of 1100 was the only major victory over them in all of later Liao history, and even after it the Zubu remained a potent enemy.

The pattern apparent in this brief sketch of Liao-Zubu relations is typical of Liao relations with a number of the larger and more powerful constituents of their multiracial state. The Liao was an empire constantly being tested by unruly components; its emperors could afford little relaxation. The multiracial structure of the Liao empire was more complex than any other such



political entity ever developed in East Asian history. The Khitans' ability to formulate a multilayered structure of governing capable of integrating all of its units flexibly and realistically is one of their great achievements, but it required constant military vigilance.

A fact of prime historical importance that emerges from an examination of Liao border affairs is that during the tenth and eleventh centuries there existed a diversity of peoples fragmented into distinct ethnic and political units, mostly small, scattered throughout the length and breadth of Inner Asia. The official *Liao History* reveals scraps of information about many of those units where it lists the offices of Liao government charged with administering their internal affairs or handling their relations with the Liao state.⁷ Those relations were directly administered by the military garrison commands to which their tribes were assigned, all under the general supervision of the Northern Chancellery.

The Liao empire in Inner Asia was a military state in which all tribal peoples were organized for total mobilization: each was assigned its place and its duties in an overarching system of military government. The surviving records describing that system therefore afford us a measure of access to the ethnographic complexity of Inner Asia of that age; the record holds many riddles for historians, in the identities, ethnic affinities, and geographic locations of peoples named as nominal or actual subordinates of the Liao Northern Chancellery. The Khitans began a process of amalgamating peoples, absorbing many into their tribal population, in that way probably accounting for the disappearance from history of some ethnic units. A more ruthless simplification of the Inner Asian ethnographic puzzle was accomplished by Chinggis Khan and his successors in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. The Mongols effectively eliminated by absorption half or more of the tribal peoples named in the Liao records. The Khitans employed methods that at times appear to have been ruthless enough, but simply were not as "definitive" as those of their Mongol cousins a century and a half later.

The official *Liao History* (compiled by Chinese historians serving the Mongol Yuan dynasty in the 1340s, utilizing older records) lists fifty-two tribes or tribal divisions that were essentially Khitan by ethnic criteria, and ten "outer tribes" that were ethnically distinct but long considered fully subordinate to the Khitan state. These included some proto-Mongol groups on the northwestern frontiers that had been subordinate to the Khitans even before 907, some Uighur groups remaining on the western slopes of the Greater Khingan Mountains after the collapse of the Uighur state in 840 (before which time the Khitans had been subordinate to them), and some tribes on the eastern borders in Manchuria (see Map 4). This grouping of sixty-two tribal entities and administrative divisions constituted the core of the Khitan state under Abaoji, and remained the center of the empire thereafter.

Beyond those core elements of the Khitan nation and state were clusters of ethnic units possessing more independence, clearly not directly administered by the Liao government but nonetheless subject to administrative restraints and obligations. These numbered six "large tribes" governed by

"kings" (*wang*) appointed or approved by the Liao government, and sixty-one "various tribes" for each of which the Northern Chancellery appointed an administrative officer. The "large tribes" included a segment of the Jurchen people living in a Khitan manner, close to the Eastern Capital, as well as some more distant branches of the ten "outer tribes." The category of "various tribes" included, for example, the "wild Jurchen" living farther to the north-east. Others included in this category were remnants of the Bohai nation that had fled beyond direct Liao rule, about twenty-five other units on the eastern and northern boundaries, and about thirty-five tribal units to the west, some as far away as the western borders of Mongolia and the edges of modern Xinjiang. As we examine these long lists of peoples beyond the eastern, northern, and western borders of the Khitan core area, we find names of border tribes whose affairs were nominally supervised by Khitan officials; the same names are duplicated for areas farther out, suggesting that in a number of cases a people was partly within and partly beyond the boundaries of the Liao empire. Those borders appear to have been fluid, changing according to the varying abilities of the Liao armies to control them.

Still farther out beyond the boundaries were seventy-eight "subordinate states," so called in the Chinese-derived usage of the time because at one time or another they had sent envoys to the Liao court offering tribute or requesting diplomatic recognition. In the Chinese view such voluntary requests for recognition and formal relations constituted "subordination." States listed in this category include the states of Korea, Japan, and Xi Xia, the seven more distant divisions of the independent Jurchen peoples (other than those nearer Jurchen units included under direct Liao administration), four divisions of the Zubu or Tatars, five representing the western Uighurs in Xinjiang, and many small units of ethnic or political distinctiveness in western Inner Asia. Diplomatic and commercial relations with many of them were sporadic and marginal, but the fact that the Liao records show contacts with them demonstrates the far-reaching awareness of the Liao empire throughout Inner Asia. The name Khitan, pronounced "Khitai" in western Asia, is the origin of the name Cathay, showing that in western Asia, and eventually in Europe, the Khitan empire was identified with a northern extension of the great civilization of the East, or China. That confusion about Cathay and China was not correctly understood in the West until the sixteenth century.

IV. LIAO-KOREAN RELATIONS

Liao relations with Korea and Xi Xia show how the two great powers in East Asia in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Chinese Song dynasty and the Khitan Liao dynasty, competed for at least nominal suzerainty over the more important smaller states lying near them. Xi Xia and Korea struggled against both Song China and the Liao to secure their borders and to retain their independence. Liao relations with Xi Xia will be discussed in Chapters 8 and 11, devoted to that state. Here I briefly examine the Korean relationship. The Liao dynasty and Korea shared a strategic boundary, one that the Liao

had pushed south beyond the Yalu River into the Korean peninsula after the conquest of the Bohai state in 926. The Liao aggression as well as cultural interactions had a profound impact on Korean history. Korea was, next to China itself, the oldest of the advanced civilizations in East Asia. It had been both a source from which and the bridge by which Japan derived many cultural elements from the mainland. During the Han dynasty at the beginning of the imperial era, the Chinese had established military outposts on what is today Korean soil. In the Tang period China had tried unsuccessfully to reassert its domination over the Koreans and their Bohai neighbors. Korean belongs to the Tungusic branch of the Altaic languages, but it nonetheless used the Chinese script and employed literary Chinese as its written language of learning and government, in somewhat the same way that medieval northern Europeans used the alien but "classical" Latin. Chinese dynasties were sensitive to that cultural link and placed high importance on their relations with the succession of states created by the Korean people.

Early in the tenth century Korea itself was undergoing great political changes: the rise of the long-lasting kingdom of Koryô (918-1392) culminated in its unification of the Korean peninsula under a single state. The last stage in the unification process was the forced abdication in 935 of the king of the previously powerful Korean state of Silla, founded in 57 B.C.E., which had controlled all of Korea from 668 onward until 935. The Khitans' conquest of the Bohai in 926 intruded into that process of Korean unification; the elimination of the Bohai state gave Liao and Korea a common boundary, but that was on what the Koreans regarded as Korean soil, well south of the Yalu River, which today marks the boundary of China and Korea. The Liao demanded Koryô's submission as a vassal state. In 915, when Abaoji was camped on the Yalu, both the king of Silla and the king of the upstart Koryô state had sent ambassadors to him, offering gifts, as the Koryô king did again in 924.

Despite conflicts of interest, the relations between the new Khitan empire and the new unified kingdom of Koryô seemed to start off well, and the histories say little about their interactions. But late in the tenth century the Liao took up a more aggressive stance, invading Koryô in the 980s and 990s and forcing the Korean king to sue for peace. In 995 the Liao court, following its established pattern, sent a patent of investiture to the new Koryô king, who had just come to the throne. That followed the Chinese protocol in interstate relations as widely observed throughout East Asia.

When a revolt unseated the Korean king in 1010, the Liao therefore intervened to support their "vassal," the legitimate king. The results were disastrous for Korea. The Liao emperor Shengzong, leading the invasion force, entered the Koryô capital at Kaegyong (modern Kaesong, northwest of Seoul) and before leaving it looted and burned the city. Between 1013 and 1019 the Liao sent envoys making territorial demands, which the Koreans resisted. Liao efforts to use force were repeatedly defeated, so the Liao prepared a massive invasion force. Then the Koryô king asked for peaceful negotiations, gaining a settlement generally favorable to Korea.

The two countries exchanged envoys in 1020, and the next year the Liao sent, on request, a Khitan princess to marry into the Koryô royal line. But in 1034 an heir to the displaced Bohai kings revolted against his Liao overlords and, when defeated, fled to Koryô, where the court granted him sanctuary and bestowed on him the Koryô royal surname, thus pointedly putting him under special protection. The Liao broke off diplomatic relations but did not again threaten to invade. At some point the Koreans resumed tribute submissions to the Liao court, and the two states coexisted more or less amicably to the end of the Liao dynasty.

We see in this relationship a pattern similar to Liao-Song relations: an early phase of aggressive Khitan involvement, followed in the eleventh century by more stable if somewhat passive diplomatic relations. Diplomatic courtesies based on the Chinese model generally defined the relationship, despite the inherent contradictions in that pattern when it was applied simultaneously by more than one state, both of which claimed "universal" sovereignty. Cultural contacts throughout the period, however, were by no means passive; they were of great importance to both Korea and Liao.

V. EXPANSION INTO NORTH CHINA

After the end of the great Tang dynasty in 907, Chinese political history proceeded through the confusing sequence of the Five Dynasties in North China, discussed in Chapter 1. The disarray in Chinese politics at that time permitted the Liao to expand into North China and create a permanent base there. The interlocking story of the Khitans' Liao dynasty and the ephemeral Chinese dynasties between 907 and 960 must be greatly simplified in the telling here. Reference to Maps 1, 4, and 5, here and in Chapters 1 and 5, will help the reader follow the story.

For the Chinese, defense of the North China Plain, where the capitals of the Five Dynasties were located, depended on control of strategic passes leading through low but often rugged mountains along the line where the Great Wall now stands. Strategic portions of that line had been protected by defended passes and walls since the third century B.C.E., when the first Great Wall of China was built.⁸ By this time the Wall itself had crumbled and mostly disappeared, but if not present as a physical monument, the Great Wall line nonetheless was deeply imbedded in people's consciousness; statesmen and historians referred to it in discussing boundaries. Along the eastern end of that line, at the northern edges of the modern provinces of Shanxi and Hebei, there were a dozen or so heavily defended "gates" or barriers (*guan*) at defiles through which traffic had to pass.⁹ They supported a defensive line stretching about 400 miles from northern Shanxi eastward to the sea, ending at present-day Shanhai Guan, the great gateway where "the mountains come to the sea." For all of the Five Dynasties (907-960), founded in succession by regional warlords based in North China, the problem was to maintain a northern defense perimeter while maintaining their political base at their capitals, either Luoyang or Kaifeng on the Yellow River in Henan, 400 miles to the south.

For the succeeding Northern Song dynasty (960-1127), the problem was to regain possession of the so-called Sixteen Prefectures on China's side of the Great Wall line, which the Khitans had held since 938. Once the conquest dynasties controlled territory south of the defensible Great Wall line, that line became unimportant. To look ahead, the native Ming dynasty after 1368 again had the problem of holding and defending the line, not only in this eastern extension but all the way across China to its western frontiers. In the late sixteenth century the Ming began building long walls to connect and defend their entire northern boundary; the Great Wall as we know it today is the product of that building project.¹⁰ After 1644 the strategic importance of the Great Wall was again reduced, for the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) created an empire that again controlled both sides of the Wall. In Abaoji's time, while there were at best insignificant remnants of an earlier wall as such, there was a barrier of strong garrisons and fortified passes. Ably defended on the Chinese side, it was enough to deny him easy access to the North China Plain.

Abaoji rose to power just as the unity of China had been temporarily destroyed, offering a possibility that China's northern defense line might be breached. That objective became an obsession with Abaoji; he bequeathed it to his successors, who pursued it with both cunning and force. In 905 Abaoji had rushed off to Datong with an army of seventy thousand cavalry to firm up the resistance of Li Keyong against his rival, the warlord in North China who in 907 would terminate the Tang dynasty and found the first of the Five Dynasties. As we have seen, Li Keyong, a Shatuo Turk, was the warlord of Shanxi, and Abaoji's sworn brother, a relationship conceived by Abaoji with the intention of profiting strategically from it. He hoped it would offer him access into China all the way down to the Yellow River, through Li's military base in the mountains of northern Shanxi.

Far easier than penetrating through mountainous Shanxi would have been to penetrate through the North China Plain in Hebei, lying to the east, directly south of the Khitan core area. Control of Youzhou would allow the Khitan cavalry to sweep south at will across the open plain. But Hebei was defended by a cluster of strong passes controlled from the prefecture of Youzhou, at the site of present-day Beijing, 200 miles east of Datong. The permanently ensconced Chinese military governors based at Youzhou in the early tenth century were among the Khitans' most aggressive and most unrelenting enemies. Another reason for forming the link to Li Keyong was to have an ally just to the west of Hebei in order to isolate and threaten those enemies. The last of those Youzhou warlords fell in battle in 913, not to Abaoji but to Li Keyong's son (who would become the emperor of the Later Tang state),¹¹ a determined opponent of the Khitans, except when he needed a sudden alliance against some other enemy.

When Abaoji received the ambassador from the Later Tang state in 926, that son of Li Keyong had already been murdered; Li Keyong's stepson Li Siyuan had just succeeded his stepbrother on the Later Tang throne and had sent his ambassador to the Liao court to announce the change of rulers.¹² The stepson's base of power had been precisely in that Hebei region coveted by

the Khitans. As the new emperor, known in history as the Later Tang emperor Mingzong, he had departed from that strategic region to take the throne at the capital. In that situation, Abaoji had thought he might intimidate Li Siyuan through his ambassador to relinquish control over Youzhou to the Khitans.

Abaoji died a few days later without having produced the result he desired, but the strategic perceptions underlying his conversation with the ambassador remained fixed in the consciousness of his successors. That is, they would continue the attempt to intimidate the rulers in China to give up their Great Wall line defense bastions; they would intervene politically rather than militarily when they could; and they would use their special but not always untroubled relationship with the assimilated Shatuo Turks in North China, who were the strategically placed regional warlords, to tip the balance when an opportunity presented itself. But if all that failed, they would be prepared to intervene militarily. One way or another the great prize had to be grasped while China was weak and disunited.

Throughout Abaoji's reign he intensified Khitan military action on the North China border, giving that activity an overall direction and an integrated strategic focus previously lacking. He sent embassies with great frequency to the more distant power centers of China, particularly to the Kaifeng court of the first of the Five Dynasties, the Later Liang, until it was overthrown by Li Keyong's son in 923. That he was so unprincipled as to deal with their mutual Chinese enemies had angered Li Keyong and his son. In China, the Khitans were depicted as mercenaries always for hire if properly compensated, ready to intervene on anyone's behalf in the smaller and larger struggles going on throughout China. There seems to have been some truth in that, but it does not mean that Abaoji had no fixed policy; his overall objective was to destabilize all the courts and power centers in China and await opportunities. Even when not ready for a major undertaking he kept up the appearance that he might be about to strike, using annual border raids by small detachments in the time-honored steppe manner. Those raids screened his larger intentions and kept China's defending border zone troops tense and exhausted.

The opportunity to continue those methods and gain a great success came to Abaoji's son Deguang, the Emperor Taizong, in the 930s. After the death of its emperor in 933, the Later Tang dynasty began to disintegrate under pressure of internal revolts. Throughout the realm, disaffected military leaders began to act independently. The most important of those was another Shatuo Turk, the son-in-law of the Later Tang emperor and the military governor of Shanxi. His name was Shi Jingtang. In the disorders of 936-938 in which Prince Bei, the Khitan expatriate resident at the Later Tang court, was assassinated (after having advised his brother Deguang that conditions were ripe for him to invade North China), Shi Jingtang revolted against the Later Tang state and influenced other military leaders to do the same. The Liao emperor, at the head of a large army, entered north Shanxi to aid Shi Jingtang, thereby getting through the passes as an invited guest. In impressive victories over the Later Tang armies he pushed beyond Datong, reaching Shi's base

at Taiyuan, the principal city of Shanxi. Militarily invincible on this occasion, the Liao emperor Taizong now could turn to other goals; he flattered Shi Jingtang into believing that he had the makings of an emperor. Entirely dependent on Khitan military power, Shi was induced to proclaim himself the founder of a new dynasty with its capital at Kaifeng on the Yellow River. He called his dynasty Jin, usually called the Later Jin—Jin being an old name for Shanxi, where Shatuo military power was based. The Liao emperor also arranged for Shi Jingtang to enter into a son-to-father relationship with him. After difficult negotiations, the wily Khitan ruler succeeded in getting his new "son" to grant him the Sixteen Prefectures, including Datong in the west and extending all across the Great Wall line to Youzhou and beyond—in short, the entire North China defense line. In fact, the ceded territory included nineteen, not sixteen, prefectures, but the phrase the "Sixteen Prefectures" became fixed as a symbol and was always used thereafter to designate the ceded territories. With very little cost Taizong thus wrung from his newly adopted relative far more than Abaoji had hoped to get from his Turkic "kinsman" in 926.¹³

The Later Jin dynasty, the third of the Five Dynasties, was seen for what it was: the puppet of the Liao throne. Its ignominious status demoralized its officers and its court. The Later Jin dynasty lasted a mere ten years; but the Liao had gained from it all that they wanted, and their hold on the Sixteen Prefectures was permanent. That proved to be a turning point in Chinese as well as in Khitan history. Datong, at the western end of the ceded zone, was designated the Liao empire's Western Capital, and at Youzhou, approximately on the site of modern Beijing, a new walled city was built to serve as the Liao Southern Capital, thus completing the system of five administrative centers for the five great divisions of the Liao empire. The Khitans now possessed the springboard into North China that they had long sought.

Curiously, however, the Sixteen Prefectures marked the practical limits of the Khitans' southward expansion into China. In 947, after invading and occupying more of North China, they began to experience the complexities of governing an immense area of sedentary population and quickly developed a distaste for that Chinese administrative morass. As we shall see, they used their strategic foothold in North China to intimidate subsequent Chinese regimes and gain many advantages from it. But that pull from the south did not distract the Khitans from their identification with the steppe.

Bizarre events that culminated in 947 were triggered by Shi Jingtang's death in 942 and the succession of his nephew. This new puppet emperor, the adoptive grandson of the Liao ruler, was sensitive to the resentment felt by both his Shatuo and his Chinese subjects against his dynasty's abject submission to the Khitans. Revolt against this puppet Jin ruler seemed imminent; the Liao court had to support him. Taizong, the reigning emperor, again came in at the head of his Khitan cavalry; this time he was forced to engage in inconclusive skirmishes that dragged on for several years. In a rout of his forces in southern Hebei in 945, he barely escaped with his life and had to flee back to his Southern Capital (present-day Beijing) on a camel. He nonetheless kept up

pressure on the rebels in the Later Jin state until it collapsed in 946. Finally he forced his way into the Jin capital at Kaifeng. Entering the city in the first month of 947, he took up residence in the imperial palaces.

Then the most curious event in all of Liao history occurred. One day (actually March 25, 947), the Liao emperor Taizong (Deguang) donned the imperial Chinese robes found in the palace apartments, ascended the throne in the great audience hall, and accepted the congratulations of the assembled court, made up of all the officials in his own entourage and all the remaining Jin officials who could be rounded up for this strange display. Early in the following month he issued a proclamation in which he officially adopted the name Liao for his dynasty and announced the beginning of a new reign period, Datong, meaning "great unity." Tantamount to proclaiming himself the emperor of China, this seems nonetheless to have been an ad hoc political decision, not the well-planned objective of his military campaign into China.

Meanwhile, in Shanxi another Shatuo Turk warlord¹⁴ proclaimed himself the founder of the fourth of the Five Dynasties, called the Later Han. In many parts of North China regional leaders announced their loyalty to him as a way of showing their resentment against the Liao presence. Full-scale military suppression of this resistance would have been a larger undertaking than Emperor Taizong was prepared for. He stayed in the Chinese capital for more than three months, until the spring heat became unbearable for northern steppe nomads.

His recently occupied territories in North China, which extended down to the Yellow River, were proving to be ungovernable. In the wake of his conquering progress across the North China Plain, he had failed to put in place local administrators subservient to him who could maintain order and facilitate the extraction of logistical support for his forces. In desperation, he turned his troops loose to pillage and plunder: that is, he adopted the steppe tactics for intimidating a sedentary enemy while drawing needed supplies from the region. His lack of foresight in failing to assign governors to the regions through which his armies had passed left large areas in a state of administrative chaos. All these difficulties quickly escalated, and the China venture, unplanned and ad hoc at best, turned out to be too costly. Unwilling to face all the tasks of ruling in this unfamiliar place, he changed his mind about being emperor of China and in late April left Kaifeng to return to the Khitan homeland. He took along with him vast amounts of material wealth from the Later Jin capital: its astronomical observatory, astronomers, and library; much of the contents of the imperial storehouses and treasuries; hundreds of officials with their families; and thousands of artisan households. With an immense train stretching many miles behind him, he commenced his progress back to the Southern Capital, whence he would push north to the Supreme Capital high on the cool slopes of the Khingan Mountains.

Deep resentments aroused by the rapacious behavior of his troops led to uprisings all along his route across the North China Plain. There were daily attacks on his slowly withdrawing army and its baggage trains. He and his generals did not know how to defend themselves against this kind of guerrilla

attack by sedentary populations. According to the *Liao History*, the Emperor Taizong expressed amazement at the ferocity of the "soft and timid" Chinese.

While passing through one of the prefectures east of the Southern Capital, already safely within Khitan-controlled territory, the emperor fell ill and died suddenly on May 18. He was only forty-five years old. His death provoked the succession crisis of 947, discussed in a foregoing section. His nephew Wuyu, the son of Prince Bei, claimed the throne, but the dowager Empress Yingtian resisted his claim. As we have seen, this nephew, known in history as the Emperor Shizong, defied his grandmother and gained the throne. He reigned briefly, spending his energies chiefly on suppressing revolts from within the imperial clan and the Khitan nobility.

The Khitan position in China began to erode, so in 951 Shizong took to the field and successfully repelled Chinese advances. During a second campaign into China in the autumn of that year, the emperor and his mother, another vigorous empress dowager who had accompanied her son into battle, were murdered by a member of the imperial clan who was attempting to usurp the throne. The attempt was unsuccessful. Instead, a son of Taizong, the second emperor, came to the throne to reign as the fourth Liao emperor until he too was murdered in 969. He was given the posthumous title of Muzong. It was at this point that the succession then passed back to a son of Shizong, that is, a grandson of Prince Bei; he is known as Emperor Jingzong (r. 968-982). The succession remained in his line until the end of the dynasty in 1125. Jingzong's son was the Emperor Shengzong, whose forty-nine-year reign, from 982 until 1031, was the longest of the dynasty. It concluded what may be called the century of Liao expansion.

For most of the decade from 951 to 960 the Emperor Muzong was beset by rebellions from within the imperial and consort clans. His ruthless suppression of these clans gradually restored the stability of the throne, giving the Liao state an opportunity to pay more attention to its neighbors.¹⁵ In the meantime the last of the Five Dynasties, called the Later Zhou (951-960), succeeded the very short-lived Later Han and vigorously began to consolidate power in North China. It had little trouble displacing the Later Han, but an offshoot of that Shatuo Turkic dynasty (I shall call it the Northern Han; some accounts call it the Eastern Han) based itself in the mountains of central Shanxi and continued to resist the Zhou. It was situated adjacent to the Liao Western Capital at Datong, and thus was of interest to the Khitans. Because of his addiction to alcohol, Muzong was known to the Chinese as "the dozing emperor." He took no vigorous action to support the Northern Han, but its proximity to Liao territories sufficed to keep it intact.

In China, the Zhou ruler emerged as one of the most able persons to appear on the Chinese political scene in a century. He fully expected that the Khitans would again invade North China on the pretext of sustaining the Eastern Han. Late in the spring of 958 he decided to preempt such a move by striking at Liao positions. He was quite as obsessed with the idea of regaining the Sixteen Prefectures as the Khitans had been with acquiring them. He breached several of the heavily defended passes along the Great Wall line, demonstrat-

ing that Chinese armies under able leaders could defeat the Khitans. He succeeded in retaking two of the Sixteen Prefectures in central Hebei; included within these prefectures were three strategic passes that controlled access into Hebei southeast from Shanxi. These two prefectures and their vital passes came to be known as the Guannan ("south of the [Waqiao] Pass," the most important of the three passes) area; they remained in Chinese hands and were a major bone of contention with the Liao thereafter. This offensive provoked the "dozing emperor" to prepare for a major military confrontation. He took personally to the field later in the summer of 959 and led a large army to the Southern Capital, but a military confrontation was averted when the Zhou ruler suddenly fell ill and died. Early in 960 the Liao emperor returned to his Supreme Capital. It appeared that nothing had changed.

In China, however, 960 was a momentous year. Zhao Kuangyin, commander in chief of the Zhou ruler's palace guard, usurped the Zhou throne. He had the backing of army leaders who feared that the Zhou state, now headed by an infant heir, would be unable to carry on the promising beginnings of a Chinese resurgence. Zhao Kuangyin immediately began to follow through with the efforts initiated by the unlucky Zhou ruler to reunite North and South China and end a century of dissolution and division. The Khitans had become important players in Chinese domestic affairs by taking advantage of that long period of weakness. Now, a strong Liao empire, firmly entrenched well within the Great Wall defense line on Chinese soil, faced a united and vigorously led Chinese state. Zhao Kuangyin became the founding emperor of the Song dynasty; he was intent on regaining China's territorial integrity.¹⁶ The conditions of the Khitan-Chinese relationship had fundamentally changed.

VI. LIAO-SONG RELATIONS

After the Song dynastic founding in 960, the two large states of East Asia initially entered upon almost two decades of peaceful relations. The Song state was intent on consolidating its control over China and strengthening its forces before trying to deal with its northern enemy. After 974 the two states began to exchange embassies to offer felicitations on New Year's Day, on imperial birthdays, and on other occasions as demanded by Chinese protocol. Profitable trade developed rapidly at crossing points along their shared boundary. Two flaws marred the relationship. One was that the Song rulers and their officials could not accept the Khitans' possession of the Sixteen Prefectures, even though they had held them since 938, long before the Song dynasty came into existence. The other was that the Liao still protected the Turkic Northern Han state, offensive to the Chinese both because it was a holdout against Song reunification of China, and because it had become a place where the displaced Shatuo Turkic military population of North China tended to gather. Like the Later Jin dynasty before it, the Northern Han had become a client state of the Liao and depended on the Khitan military to survive.

When Zhao Kuangyin, the founder of the Song dynasty, seized the throne in 960, there were still half a dozen independent Chinese states scattered across the map, and there were thirty or more military governorships, some dating from the Tang period, that had become hereditary fiefs of petty warlords. Zhao was a cautious man who preferred to win over or coerce those regional leaders without waging war; he was willing to grant generous terms to those who saw the inevitable trend toward unification and surrendered their powers. When he died in 976, the unification of all China under the Song dynasty was on the verge of being completed. The Song court had begun to feel very self-assured in its possession of the Mandate of Heaven. In 976, the last year of his life, the Song founder attacked the last of the holdout states in the north, the despised Northern Han, which, with Khitan assistance, defeated the Song armies. The next year his brother, as the new emperor, again attacked the Northern Han. Negotiations followed, and more than a year passed. Then, early in 979, the Song armies, led by the second emperor, defeated a minor Liao army sent to aid the Northern Han. The latter collapsed, and the Song ruler rejoiced; a contemptible irritation had been removed, and the Liao support had not saved it. Emboldened by this success, the emperor determined to press on against the Liao in the Sixteen Prefectures. Without adequate provisions, and against all his generals' advice, he led the exhausted Chinese troops eastward from Taiyuan and through the Taihang Mountains down onto the North China Plain. They surrounded the Liao Southern Capital (modern Beijing). Alarmed by the defeat of their relief forces and the fall of the Northern Han in July, the Liao court now prepared for battle in earnest. The Liao armies engaged the Song forces on the first of August at the battle of the Gaoliang River in the environs of present-day Beijing. It was a debacle for the Song armies. Completely routed and demoralized despite their exhilarating victory at Taiyuan a month earlier, they straggled back to Kaifeng. The emperor fled the battlefield in a mule cart; military glory had evaded him.¹⁷

The Khitans then reinforced their positions in the Sixteen Prefectures to prevent another rash effort by the Chinese. In 982 the tyrannical Liao emperor Jingzong died while hunting near the Western Capital. He was succeeded by his eleven-year-old son, the Emperor Shengzong, who reigned until 1031. The youth of the new emperor may have seemed to afford an opportunity to the Song. They failed to reckon with his fiercely aggressive mother; there was no loss of control at the Liao court during that transition. Full of hope, the Song emperor Taizong in 986 tried again to take the offensive; three large armies were sent to attack simultaneously on three different fronts. The Liao forces won decisive victories on all three. The Song offensive was withdrawn and diplomatic relations were resumed.

The Song emperor died in 997 without having ever again attempted military action on the northern borders. He was succeeded by his son, a timid creature known as the Emperor Zhenzong, overall one of the less admirable Song emperors. Relations between the two states worsened through the 990s. Repeatedly the Liao court received information that the Song had attempted

to lure the Liao's border zone enemies to join them in coordinated attacks. Border skirmishes in North China increased. Anxious Song envoys sought negotiations but were refused. It seemed clear to all that the young Liao emperor, now approaching thirty, spurred on by his formidably capable mother, was planning to chastise the Song. In 999 he commenced a series of annual campaigns that were largely successful but won him no landmark victories.

In 1004 the Liao emperor Shengzong again launched a major campaign against the Song. Near the end of October, leading a large cavalry force in person, and with his mother following not far behind, he left from the Southern Capital and moved rapidly southward, capturing those cities that surrendered easily but not waiting to bring down those that resisted. Thus the Khitan army bypassed many entrenched Song units, and with lightning speed made the final dash toward Kaifeng, stopping just north of the Yellow River near the small district city of Shanyuan.¹⁸ There they set up camp, waiting, still almost a hundred miles from the Song capital. Emperor Zhenzong, under the influence of a "war party" at his court, had reluctantly marched north at the head of a large army to display resistance to the Khitan invasion; the imperial camp and court were set up within the city walls of Shanyuan. By the end of December the Song court was sending secret messages to Chinese officials serving the Liao, inquiring about terms for peace. As always, the Chinese court was divided between war and peace factions, and their emperor was both fearful and indecisive. The idea of paying the Khitans to go away seems to have originated with the Chinese court; it was not initially a demand of the Khitans.

The Liao emperor's tents and his central command post had been set up a few miles north of Shanyuan. At Shanyuan, as the two emperors at the head of their two armies faced each other, a treaty of peace was worked out between January 13 and 18, 1005, by the modern Western calendar. (History books sometimes date it to the year 1004 because those dates fell within the last lunar month of the year that principally corresponds with 1004 in our calendar.) At first the Liao expected to negotiate a territorial concession—the return of the strategic Guannan area in central Hebei. They abandoned that demand in the face of stubborn Song resistance and the quite unexpected alternative terms offered by the Song court for a negotiated peace settlement. The Chinese agreed to give the Khitans a payment of 200,000 bolts of silk and 100,000 ounces of silver annually. The two rulers would address each other as "emperor," that is, as equals. The two empires would maintain friendly relations, would refrain from building further defenses on their common border, would demarcate their disputed borders and then respect them, would agree to maintain proper relations with regard to certain other issues, and would swear in religious oaths of high solemnity to honor the treaty. The Liao agreed without much hesitation. The Song would call the annual payment a gift while the Liao would label it tribute, an important difference. An additional aspect of the settlement, not specified in the text of the treaty but undoubtedly worked out in detail by the negotiators, was that the two imperial households would establish a fictive kinship relationship by which

the two "brother emperors" would address each other as "elder brother" or "younger brother" according to which was actually senior, and would extend the kinship terms to all other members of their immediate clans. Thus the formidable Empress Xiao, the Liao emperor's mother, became the Song emperor's "junior aunt." The kinship relationship was retained to the end of the Liao dynasty.¹⁹

The timorous Song emperor and some of his courtiers of the "peace party" congratulated themselves on having arranged a clever bargain. By some estimates their self-congratulations were justified. They were not, however, unopposed at the Song court. Chinese military leaders realized that the Liao army was seriously overextended and exposed. They wanted to ignore the treaty settlement and fight. Some high-minded Song scholar-officials of the "war party" agreed with their assessment, and historians have offered a strong case for believing that the Chinese armies could have seriously embarrassed the Khitan invaders. The prevailing sentiment at court was that the settlement would bring them peace in their time: "We shall secure a century of peaceful relations," they boasted confidently. Struggles between war and peace factions were a constant feature of Song dynasty politics thereafter, until the Mongols ended the Song dynasty 270 years later. But for the next century, until the struggle against the Jurchens terminated both the Liao and the Northern Song, the two powers fought no more major wars.

The pattern of indemnified peace established by the Treaty of Shanyuan was thereafter central to Song China's relations with the Liao, the Xi Xia, and the Jin conquest dynasties. The Inner Asian states learned to threaten war, demand territory, or require other concessions, and the Song learned to resist most of those demands by paying ever higher indemnities. In 1042, for example, under pressure from Xi Xia incursions in the northwest and vague threats of impending Liao military action in concert with them, the Song offered to increase the annual payments to 300,000 bolts of silk and 200,000 ounces of silver. The Song court nonetheless adamantly refused to give up the strategic Guannan area in central Hebei, or other territory, or to send a baby daughter of the Song emperor to become the future bride of the Liao emperor's son. The loss of territory and the indignity of sending a princess to marry a foreign ruler were regarded as much less acceptable than the higher annual payments. Throughout all their trials and tribulations with their barbarian foes, the Song court took comfort from the idea that they were exporting civilizing influences to the steppe, and that those influences would eventually work to the advantage of all. The official *Song History* in its "Account of Foreign Countries" (*juan* 485) states: "Could one say that even the kings of antiquity ever exceeded the Song in their policies of extending gentle kindness to faraway peoples in order to win their hearts?" To be sure, the expansive power of the Liao dynasty undoubtedly declined from the mid-eleventh century onward. An answer to whether that was brought about because the subtle infusion of Chinese civilizing influences had "won their hearts" or because of other factors must remain in doubt, though a closer look at the later phases of Liao history may clarify that issue.



LIAO CIVILIZATION

Throughout two centuries of the Khitan Liao dynasty's intimate interaction with the Chinese, the earlier Khitan way of life developed into what we may call "Liao civilization." Throughout that process of change, the Khitan people remained true to their identification with their traditional steppe values. Their invention of dual institutions, realized most notably in their division of government into Northern and Southern Chancelleries, was designed to preserve their distinctiveness; it did much more than that, and was one of the most important breakthroughs in Asian history. The hybrid imperial institution fostered multicultural adaptations in many aspects of life, from laws and regulations governing social practices to the uses of literacy in Khitan and in Chinese among the ruling elite. Above all, the Liao period practice of Buddhism offers us a revealing focus on Liao civilization, in its many-sided interactions among Inner Asian and East Asian peoples. Liao success in creating and managing the empire still defies easy explanation: the concept of "creative misunderstanding" is explored here as a partial explanation of the impressive Khitan historical achievement.

I. MULTICULTURAL ADAPTATIONS

History is a challenge to our imaginations as well as to our skill in assembling and assessing facts. Under the best of circumstances the historian must attempt to reconstruct larger patterns from incomplete information. That is especially true in piecing together the social histories of peoples from records that were not intended to inform us about all the issues we today may consider important. As we might expect, the vast documentation of Chinese history tells us primarily about the things that Chinese of the past considered essential. It tells us much less about the details, for example, of demography, of social practice, of popular custom and belief, about discrepancies between ideal and actual patterns, and many other things that the modern social histo-

rian would like to know. Yet carefully imaginative reading of the historical record can provide some important clues even about these matters. A large and important modern work on Liao social history assembles the randomly preserved details of social management as recorded in the Chinese official Liao dynastic history.¹ The following extracts translated from that history invite us to think about the social circumstances to which they refer, and to draw inferences from them:

[921 C.E.:] "... all barbarian tribes were now pacified. The high officials were ordered by edict to establish [special] laws for the Khitans and for all barbarians, while the Chinese were sentenced according to [their own] laws and decrees." (Wittfogel 1946, p. 227)

[938-947:] "This was the system of Liao: During the Huitong period [937-945] the emperor's mother and the officials of the Northern Region dressed according to the national [Khitan] style. The emperor and the officials of the Southern Region dressed according to Chinese style." (pp. 227-228)

[941:] "On the day *bingzhen* . . . it was decreed that Khitan individuals who held Chinese offices [i.e., offices in the Southern Chancellery] were to follow Chinese customs and might intermarry with Chinese." (p. 228)

[After 983:] "After [the reign period Qianheng, 978-982], at big ceremonies even officials of the third rank and above in the Northern Region also wore Chinese clothes. After the reign period Chongxi [1032] at big ceremonies all [officials] dressed in the Chinese style." (p. 228)

[989:] "Previously, when a death occurred in a brawl between Khitan and Chinese, justice was not even-handed. Now it was applied impartially." (p. 231)

[994:] "In the twelfth year of Tonghe [994] it was decreed that Khitans who had committed one of the ten grave crimes should also be sentenced according to [Chinese] law." (p. 231)

In the first of these extracts the phrase "for the Khitans and for all barbarians" reflects the Chinese historians' usual way of designating non-Chinese peoples, even though the *Liao History* was officially compiled in the 1340s on command of the Mongol Yuan dynasty, itself a "barbarian" dynasty.² The principle that there should be dual systems of law for the two populations was accepted at the beginning, while Abaoji was still alive. The second extract, dated to the first reign after his death, shows that the Northern Chancellery, always directed by appointees from the Xiao clan which provided all imperial consorts, adhered to Khitan tribal ways in important ritual matters such as dress. In contrast, the emperors and their Yelü clan based at the Southern Chancellery accommodated more quickly to Chinese styles.

The last two extracts, concerning law, reveal that Chinese definitions of such matters as "the ten grave crimes" had been extended to all, Chinese and non-Chinese alike, by the end of the tenth century. They appear to indicate

that Liao law was moving away from individual-oriented "ethnic law" toward the realization of statewide uniformity in "territorial law," a considerable advance both in terms of legal concepts and as a practical measure for providing uniform conditions throughout the area under the Liao dynasty administration. The model of codified law was Chinese: it was found in the Tang Code, which continued in force throughout the Five Dynasties, when the Liao first acquired their large Chinese subject population in the Sixteen Prefectures, and was known throughout East Asia where Chinese cultural and political norms had influence. The Liao attempted to supersede its use by compiling their own comprehensive collection of regulations and statutes, their compilation dating from 1036 probably remained in force throughout the remainder of the dynasty.

Despite the promulgation of measures such as those dated 989 and 994, conflicts between Chinese and Khitan law were never fully resolved. The administration of justice remained a haphazard matter, in part because it could not be assumed that all the local administrators would be literate in classical Chinese, the language of the statutes. We find many Chinese complaints about the harshness of Liao legal practice and discrimination against the subject peoples, conditions to be expected wherever conquerors try to maintain their advantages over the conquered. Chinese envoys traveling through Liao territory en route to the capital had opportunities to observe conditions and to talk with the Chinese subjects.³ They were not unbiased observers, but they reported much dissatisfaction expressed by Chinese over their plight under Khitan rule, complaining both that the laws, when followed, were severe, and that legal protections were not enforced when to do so would not serve Khitan interests.⁴ The subject populations were not usually unstable or on the brink of rebellion and disorder, but the Liao government could not fully trust them, for in times of emergency they regularly defied the Khitans' authority over them.⁵

Whether it be in fundamental issues of duality in the country's laws, or seemingly superficial ones of prescribed costume, the multicultural character of the Liao period is apparent. The civilization developed by the Khitan people from the time of their clear emergence into the Chinese historical records during the Tang period, through the rise of Abaoji and the creation of the Liao dynasty in the tenth century, and finally to the collapse of the Liao state in the twelfth century increasingly displays the marks of a hybrid way of life. The Khitans were a nomadic steppe people whose involvement with their sedentary neighbors, as well as with other non-Khitan nomadic peoples, forced them to interact with and accommodate a variety of cultures and institutions. That same challenge faced all the conquest dynasties, but they differed widely in their responses to it. The pattern of Khitan response, in particular the response to Chinese civilization (which the Chinese historical records cover the most fully), reveals the special qualities of the Khitan adaptation. Faced with the need to utilize Chinese means for governing the large sedentary sector of its conquests, whose populations several times outnumbered its own, the Khitans produced what was in many ways a hybrid civilization. Nonetheless,

less, they largely succeeded in that difficult task of governing without giving up the fundamental commitment to their original steppe way of life.

The skill with which the Khitan ruling elite led their people in walking that tightrope for more than two centuries commands our respect. They were the pathbreaking innovators in devising new institutions required for this difficult task. They also were in many ways the most successful of all the steppe practitioners of dual administration. That experience, incidentally, might today be seen as a pertinent historical precedent for current Chinese plans forecasting "one country, two systems" (even though contemporary advocates are ignorant of their history). Be that as it may, the methods worked out by tenth-century Khitans and their advisers for maintaining the integrity of their own civilization, while ruling over and drawing heavily upon the quite different civilizations of sedentary peoples, established the framework within which Khitan civilization developed under the Liao dynasty.

II. KHITAN SOCIETY

We have seen that the official dynastic histories incidentally reveal fascinating bits of information about Khitan society, yet the present state of our knowledge does not permit us to describe it fully or with assurance. We know too little of its kinship terms or other features of base-level social organization. Most of what we know has to do with the larger units of social organization such as the names of tribes and of some clans. Even that information is imprecise because it comes from Chinese historical records, where, of course, Chinese terms for social organization are used. The Chinese term *zu* (lineage, clan) usually means in Chinese society the common descent group from a real ancestor. As the Chinese use the term, it implies that all members of the society possessed surnames, practiced surname exogamy, maintained a ritual focus on ancestors, recognized *zu* leadership based on primogeniture, and observed a hierarchy of authority and deference based on systematically specified degrees of kinship as well as on age and generational place. The term *zu*, when borrowed by Chinese writers as analogue to some form of Khitan tribal or clan organization (probably not well understood by them), becomes quite misleading, for we have no reason to believe that those defining elements of the Chinese *zu* were generally present in Khitan society. In 1074, when a member of the imperial Yelü clan recommended that the practice of using surnames be extended from the Yelü imperial and the Xiao consort clans to include the entire society "so as to make marriages between men and women harmonize with the code of proper behavior," the emperor thought about it and rejected that essentially Chinese idea. He felt that the old Khitan order "should not be suddenly changed." That was a full century and a half after Abaoji's death.⁶ We assume that the Khitans reckoned kinship in ways meaningful to them, expressed in religious practices and reflected in authority patterns, but beyond such hypothetical assumptions we can say very little about Khitan social patterns.

It is clear that Khitan women, like women generally in other steppe

tribal nations, possessed considerable freedom and authority compared with women in East Asian sedentary societies. Khitan women to be sure lived in a strongly patriarchal society, yet they nonetheless could possess and freely use wealth and property, they could initiate divorce, and divorced women could freely remarry. In the high elite strata of Khitan society, women could hold important civil and even military positions. Empresses were truly co-rulers with their emperor husbands or sons. We can be less sure about the status of women in ordinary households, but it is certain that they shared the heavy work of tending flocks; they rode horseback and drove wagons; and they cared for and defended their settlements when their men were away at war or the hunt. They were not excluded from important positions in the ritual and religious lives of their people. The hard life of the steppe was shared by men and women and children; the women may well have borne more than their share of the heavy work needed to maintain daily life. They had to be competent in many forms of labor, and cope with extremes of hardship and danger that their less free Chinese counterparts were spared. Although the emperor rejected the imposition of Chinese surnames and marriage patterns on Khitan society, we are not told why he hesitated. The old practices must still have had utility in their society.

As early as 940 an imperial decree abolished the traditional practice of requiring a younger sister to take the place in marriage of an older sister who died, but that did not eliminate the sororate⁷ as a voluntary pattern in marriage. The levirate⁸ too remained a general practice in Khitan as in other steppe tribal societies; it of course encountered strong Chinese ethical objections, yet it never was abolished and was practiced in the imperial family. It kept widowed women and their children within the clan. Polygamy in which multiple wives all were recognized as having equal status probably had been the norm in tribal society. As the imperial clan adopted the idea of primogeniture, however, it became useful to distinguish between principal wives and lesser wives for determining inheritance. That is, in order to lessen disputes about which sons might inherit and in what sequence, it was useful to label wives other than the first wife as lesser wives or "concubines," to place limits on their sons' rights to compete. Thus, although the Chinese institution of concubinage was adopted and became a pattern within the elite, it may not have deeply affected practice among ordinary people in Khitan tribal society. There are tantalizing but fragmentary bits of information, unfortunately not enough to satisfy our curiosity about many aspects of Khitan society. We have no reason to believe that Khitan social structure changed significantly during the 200 years of the Liao dynasty; it remained a society organized in tribal units, functionally well adapted to the needs of an essentially nomadic, military way of life.

III. PATTERNS OF ACCULTURATION

The advanced pastoral nomadism of tenth-century Inner Asia can in no way be seen as a primitive state of social organization; this point must be repeated

edly stressed. Although the nomadic societies were "barbarian" according to Chinese usage, and in our eyes also were significantly "different" as we look at the world from the vantage point of Chinese history, we should take the term "barbarian" merely to mean "different" in specific ways. In examining that difference we should recognize that many sedentary peoples in East Asia at that time possessed skills and capacities which nomadic societies had not needed to develop to high levels. When faced with new needs in governing or in war, nomadic peoples often had to adapt skills and techniques learned from others. New techniques of military organization and warfare tended to be adapted from other steppe peoples, except when specifically non-steppe technical skills were needed. For example, they learned from Chinese associates how to tunnel under fortified city walls, to breach walls with gunpowder, and to construct siege machinery. They had little need for naval skills and made no attempt to adapt them from their seafaring neighbors such as the Koreans; their focus was on the Inner Asian and Chinese frontiers.

In matters of organizing the state, a primary specialization of Chinese civilization, the Khitans, like all Inner Asian nomads, tended to look to China, borrowing either directly or through partially sinified intermediaries such as the Bohai and the Koreans. They learned to borrow concepts and methods they could adapt, and they also learned to co-opt aliens such as surrendered or captured Chinese who could perform specialized services for them. In the succession of conquest dynasties from the Liao to the Mongols' Yuan dynasty (and, looking forward, to the Manchus in the seventeenth century), we see a variety of such adaptations of Chinese patterns to the steppe conquerors' changing needs; we must not overlook influences going from steppe to sedentary China as well.

Relatively few Chinese could shoot a crossbow from the back of a galloping horse, and early in their history very few Khitans could write classical Chinese poetry. Why, indeed, should either try to acquire the other's skills? Eventually, in fact, large numbers of skilled Chinese cavalymen and Khitan literati appeared. To be more accurate, skilled Chinese cavalry soldiers had appeared throughout Chinese history, since the fourth century B.C.E., when the Chinese first took up cavalry warfare from Inner Asian models. Chinese on the frontier could always adapt in that way, whenever pressed by immediate needs to do so. The Khitan incursions into the northern border zone provided the Chinese there with a new stimulus to borrow steppe fighting skills, but in Chinese society such skills on the whole remained geographically limited to the north and therefore were peripheral to the general populace. It was in the border zones in these centuries that some Chinese became skilled cavalymen and assimilated fully into steppe society, in some cases even taking steppe surnames and abandoning Chinese beliefs. They were numerous enough to prove the point that Confucius had sadly observed 1,500 years earlier: Chinese could become barbarians.⁹ The distinction was cultural, not racial.

As for Khitans learning to write classical Chinese poetry, that too was at first peripheral to the needs of Khitan society; but when that skill came to serve useful functions, Khitan society could produce persons who were

accepted as worthy peers by Chinese scholar-officials. Successive conquering steppe peoples varied greatly in their adaptation to the traditional accomplishments of elite Chinese society. For example, by the eleventh century the number of Khitans who could write polished Chinese poetry appears to have been considerably greater than the number of fourteenth-century Mongols who could do the same after ruling in China for a century. Why was that so? We can hypothesize about a number of answers, but none of the possible answers has anything to do with differences in intelligence. The steppe peoples were nothing if not adaptable, educable, and capable of rapid growth in their cultural skills. Their adaptations were not limited to things drawn from China; all the varieties of steppe nomad social experience also contributed in important ways to their brilliant success.

Giving the Khitans and other steppe peoples their due, however, does not demand that we forgo all value judgments. Quite simply, for most of us (though not necessarily for everyone), the norms and the peculiar achievements of Chinese civilization hold more intrinsic value than do those of the nomads. The refinement of their learned, humanistic tradition did not make all Chinese admirable: they neither precluded all heinous acts among Chinese nor prevented such perversions as footbinding, which was imposed on Chinese women for almost a thousand years, starting at about this time in the tenth century. Its faults notwithstanding, most outside observers have always concluded that China's civilization provided better resources for the realization of human potential than did the steppe civilizations. Objectively speaking, the tools that the Chinese had developed for generating, preserving, and transmitting knowledge, and the more stable conditions in which sedentary life developed, gave greater resources to the Chinese people than the Inner Asians enjoyed.

The Khitans themselves, for all their proud self-confidence and attachment to steppe values, nonetheless clearly observed and acknowledged that they could learn from China; they strove to acquire and utilize not only the material goods but also some of the social forms and cultural tools of their sedentary neighbors. A prime example is their creation of their own distinctive writing systems: one, their "large script," adapted elements of Chinese writing; the other, somewhat more phonetic "small script" was based on Uighur writing but still utilized Chinese graphic forms. Yet having accomplished a symbolic independence from Chinese culture while achieving literacy, they at the same time made pragmatic use of Chinese in appropriate contexts, and those occasions probably far outnumbered the situations in which their own writing system was employed. They managed to have it both ways.

All the conquest dynasties were illiterate through their initial rise to power, and all made literacy for their people a priority during the first phases of their conquest regimes. Chinese-style literacy, whether seen as a social tool providing access to and sustenance of the literary tradition that maintained the Chinese ethos, or as an indispensable instrument in managing any large society, or, still more specifically, as the tool for standardizing and regulating procedures, keeping the records of tax levies and disbursements in order to

enhance the efficiency and rationality of fiscal systems—all of those, but particularly the more specific applications to state wealth and power—was something the Khitans could admire and envy.

They saw that borrowing literacy and letting it function throughout society would exact a price. That was true where literacy in the Chinese language became necessary for Khitans who worked in their Southern Region; to some extent it was also true where literacy in the Khitan scripts became necessary to the work in the Northern Region, where even the governing of other nomads gradually came to require written records and regularized written procedures. The borrower of cultural tools pays for them in many ways; that is true of all cultural borrowing. If we cannot demonstrate that all the mounted warriors of Inner Asia now became subject to the clerk's and scribe's pens, we know at least that the ways by which nomad governed nomad underwent some changes.

In the case of literacy and the Chinese cultural influences associated with it, the Khitans managed, whether or not by fully conscious design, to prevent the costs to their cultural integrity from becoming too great. Chinese literacy and the service careers dependent on it were restricted within Khitan society to their elite; some members of certain families of nobles and chieftains monopolized the Khitan participation in those functions. Many others of the elite were not so deeply involved, and the common people probably not at all. When the Khitans first adopted the Chinese-style civil service examinations in the 930s and then fully implemented the examination system from 988 onward, participation was limited to non-Khitans, in effect making the examination route to government office the exclusive preserve of Chinese, along with some Bohai, Koreans, and other peripheral subjects of their realm.

The way in which the civil service examination system was made to function informs us about the Khitans' cautious use of borrowed institutions. In Chapter 2 I described their adoption of dual institutions: they used steppe practices for governing themselves and other nomadic tribes and Chinese institutions for governing the sedentary zone of their empire. The resulting system of dual institutions for governing disparate populations making up the two halves of the Khitan empire has been called Abaoji's brilliant achievement, a genuine "breakthrough" conception of how tribal peoples from beyond the Chinese culture sphere could build an integrated empire. Still, they faced the problem of staffing the Chinese side of their empire in as reliable a manner as could be devised.

By Tang times, when the Khitans first became deeply involved with China, the problem of staffing a civil bureaucracy in China had come to be solved by the competitive examinations. The Khitans of course knew all about the Tang dynasty's system of civil service examinations and recruitment, but they could see that it created an official (if "open") elite having its own powerful sense of tradition, and that the proud Chinese holders of the highest civil service degree gained through it a semiautonomous source of authority. The Liao rulers were concerned about problems of control and were hesitant to introduce an institution that might generate its own norms of behavior. They

probably were not prepared to state the problem in the terms that we now use, that is, that the Chinese system of civil service examinations and recruitment, with its attendant educational traditions and social prestige (even in Tang times, before the still more open system of Song had come about), was one of the society's principal defining institutions (see Chapter 6). Yet they grasped its implications and were wary of it.

Nevertheless, they had accepted the necessity of governing the sedentary population by Chinese means, and there was a strong desire among their Chinese subjects to implement the examination system as the appropriate way to recruit staff for the Southern Chancellery and local levels of government in Liao-controlled North China. The Khitan rulers waited over sixty years, until 988, before at last implementing an examination system based on the Chinese Tang and Song models: from that date forward they held the highest-level triennial examinations at their Southern Capital fifty-four times until 1123, shortly before the dynasty fell. At first they awarded only three or five degrees at each examination, but from 1014 onward they regularly bestowed from 30 to 130 degrees every three years. The total for the entire period was about 2,000 *jinsbi*, or highest-level degrees.¹⁰ That is a much smaller number than in the Jurchen Jin dynasty in the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and much smaller than the number of *jinsbi* produced in contemporary Northern Song China, or in later Chinese dynasties, as comparisons in later chapters will show.

Not only were the Khitans reluctant to implement the system and allow its full functioning, but also they appear to have appointed to office only a small portion of the *jinsbi*, the highest-level degree holders, that it generated. They simultaneously adopted and modified to their social ends Tang systems of "protected" access to office (the *yin* privilege) and methods of sponsorship and recommendation. In Tang, and even more so in Song China, those alternate ways of selecting and appointing carried less prestige than the individually earned degree. But to the Khitans, the direct appointment to persons whose families already had high status seemed to match the norms of their aristocratic society; it seemed proper that persons of high social status should have direct access to government. Persons appointed in that way were rewarded for their families' standing and past service, issues of great import in a tribal aristocracy; their loyalty was more important to the government than other considerations. The numbers of such direct appointees appear to have exceeded the numbers of those who achieved rank and office via the examination route.¹¹ In short, the Khitans neither ignored the essential instrument of Chinese bureaucratic government nor did they allow it to play a defining role in their dual society.

Khitans were expressly forbidden from taking the examinations, but of course they did not need to do so. All tribesmen who were qualified for official posts, whether those posts would seem to demand knowledge of Chinese or not, could be appointed anywhere in the bureaucracy in accordance with the Khitan-style "inherited privilege," also called *yin*, or "protection," in the Chinese sources. That concept of privilege gave Khitans priority in appointment

anywhere within civil or military government; or they might come into inherited offices belonging in their families. In short, Khitans could gain office without the need to display excellence in Chinese learning. Despite that, as time went on the number of them who became the educational peers of the Chinese degree holders steadily increased. To the end of the dynasty such Khitan learned persons were forbidden to take the examinations, so we might ask why they should choose to acquire high educational qualifications. The reasons why men of the Khitan elite chose to acquire deep cultivation in the heritage of Chinese civilization were personal, not to advance political careers. Some developed intellectual interests, others aesthetic pursuits. For many the study of Buddhism also was a powerful motivating factor.

IV. BUDDHISM IN KHITAN LIFE

Prince Bei's biography in the *Liao History* recounts that in 916, when Abaoji first took the title of emperor, he also adopted a calendar and proclaimed a reign title, inserting himself into the Chinese ideal cosmos by assuming these prerogatives of the universal ruler. As emperor of a new dynasty, he also named his eldest son, Prince Bei, his heir. The biography gives the impression that it was during those ceremonies when he turned to his assembled officials and said:

"The ruler who has received the Mandate of Heaven should be attentive to Heaven and respectful to the great spirits. To those of greatest merit I should offer my veneration. Which among them ranks first?" All present replied that it should be the Buddha. Abaoji responded: "Buddhism is not a Chinese teaching." Then Prince Bei spoke: "Confucius is the great sage, revered for myriad generations. He should rank first." Abaoji was delighted. Thereupon he ordered that a Confucian temple be constructed and decreed that the heir himself should conduct the spring and autumn ritual offerings.¹²

The Chinese historians who compiled the *Liao History* probably thought that the anecdote belonged in Prince Bei's biography instead of in the annals of Abaoji's reign because it contributes to the prince's image as a Confucian paragon, a theme of the biography. It may well be in some measure fanciful, but it is nonetheless interesting for several reasons. We need not doubt that Abaoji thought of the imperial institution which he was at that moment attempting to adapt to Khitan needs as something supported by Chinese teachings, especially by Confucianism. Two years later we read that he ordered the construction of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist temples, and later he visited the Confucian temple while ordering the empress and the heir to make offerings at the Buddhist and Daoist temples. Despite the formal continuation of the Confucian cult at the court, after his reign we read, however, almost exclusively about imperial involvement with Buddhism.

We do not know whether Buddhist institutions had been imported into Khitan lands before the time of Abaoji, but the Khitans must have been

familiar with Buddhist practice through their long contact with Tang China before 907. The "great suppression" of Buddhism by the Tang court in 845 may have sharpened their awareness that Buddhism had once been denounced in China as a foreign creed. Abaoji's courtiers clearly expressed their allegiance to it when asked which of the great spirits should be ranked first by the state. That may reflect another point of their resistance to Abaoji's effort to alter the character of Khitan government.

It would be useful to know more about how and when Buddhism became so popular among the Khitan elite. Within a few decades after the dynasty's founding, it clearly had become the most visible of the religions in the records of Liao history. There is a quite noticeable increase of interest during the reign of Emperor Shengzong, which began in 982, and attention to Buddhist activities continued under his successors. Emperors, empresses, and many other members of the imperial clan built Buddhist temples, offered food to immense gatherings of monks, copied sutras in their own Chinese calligraphy, sponsored the study and printing of Buddhist texts, participated in ceremonies, and patronized the Indian religion extravagantly. During one year (1078), for example, local offices of government throughout the realm made offerings of food at Buddhist temples and reported that their offerings had reached a total of 360,000 monks and nuns. It has been estimated that the total population of the Liao empire at that time, including sedentary and tribal populations, was about 3.8 million persons, so if both sets of figures are correct (and they could be), almost one in ten was a monk or nun. The numbers reached by the offerings of food may be exaggerated, but even if they should be discounted by half or more, they still would indicate a very large Buddhist establishment in Liao society.¹³

Throughout the Liao dynasty we can speak of an unending Khitan fascination with Buddhism. It pervaded the Khitan tribal nobility, and it was strong among the almost 3 million Chinese and other sedentary subjects of the Liao state. Support of the Buddhist establishment affected the economy in a number of ways; for example, large numbers of sedentary households were bestowed on temples, where they became indentured laborers who worked the temples' large landholdings and craftsmen for their building projects. There is no evidence that the drain on the economy adversely affected the prosperous Liao state, but the diversion of energies may have affected the society in other ways. We do not know how thoroughly the Khitan tribesmen in the Inner Asian steppe may have become Buddhists; most of the surviving monuments of Liao Buddhism are in the Southern Region, where the population was sedentary and mostly Chinese.

The widespread elite adherence to Buddhism does not mean that the original tribal religion was displaced. The Khitans shared with most of the steppe peoples an animistic religion which we may refer to in general terms as shamanism. In the tribal religion the sun was worshipped, and ritually the emperor sat facing the rising sun in the east (not facing south, in the Chinese manner), thereby giving ritual priority to the north, which was at his left hand, over the south, the direction in which China lay, on his right, for like

the Chinese, but unlike the later Mongols, the Khitans gave precedence to the left over the right. The royal tents and most ordinary dwellings faced to the east; Chinese palace layout and ordinary house plans opened to the sun in the south. This ritual priority of the east is reflected throughout the Khitans' arrangements of governing: for example, the Northern Chancellery and the Northern Region (to the left of the seated emperor) took precedence over the Southern Chancellery and the Southern Region; that comfortingly assured them that the tribal homeland was more important to the tribal society than were the throne's Chinese interests.

In addition to the primary focus on the sun, other supreme spirits were those of Heaven and of Earth. The entire natural world was filled with spirits and deities. Spirits of Muye Mountain, the legendary home of the Khitans' ancestors, were most highly honored among terrestrial spirits, but rivers and streams, certain animals, the "Black Mountain" where other guardian spirits of the people dwelled, and other features of the natural world also were venerated.

Shamans, as divinely touched intermediaries, helped man communicate with the powers ruling the natural universe and thus harmonize life. That well-developed system of fundamental religious ideas was proudly retained and probably was of primary importance in the daily life of ordinary people. The elite simply added on the layers of Chinese teachings, those of Confucianism and of Daoism, and especially of Buddhism, known to them in its long-naturalized Chinese forms. Buddhism was not only "non-Chinese" in origin but also was known to the Khitans as the religion of the Uighurs, who had absorbed it via China, and who provided an influential Inner Asian precedent for its adoption. But the situation is made more complex by the fact that just at this time the Uighurs themselves were turning from Buddhism to Manichaeism, a western Asian religion that they had discovered at the Tang capital during the eighth and ninth centuries, and had encountered again after their move to western Inner Asia.

Buddhism and Manichaeism could easily coexist. In fact, neither of these religious and philosophical systems demanded exclusive devotion from its followers. They selectively reinforced each other in the steppe, and parallels for such syncretism were also known in China. The notion of "exclusive truth" was absent from the East Asian mentality; even when the jealous God of monotheism was imported with Judaism, Nestorian Christianity, and Islam during these centuries, it was most difficult to maintain that idea in the prevailing atmosphere of Asian religions' mutual compatibility.

Throughout East Asia, strange though it may seem, the Buddhist religion of compassion that regards the taking of any life as a great evil has often appealed to warrior societies. The Liao emperor, the quintessential exemplar of a tribal warrior for his people, ordered that the Lord Buddha be addressed by the title "The Benevolent King Who Guards the Country." There were well-established Chinese precedents for giving Buddhism the function of guarding the state and thereby gaining imperial patronage. The Khitan rulers appear to have gone well beyond Chinese experience in seeking the religion's

protection of the state by associating Buddhism more specifically with the warrior life; they invoked its protection for armies in battle and made massive offerings to celebrate victories while placating the souls of those who had fallen in battle. The state's favor undoubtedly encouraged individuals to make personal commitments to the Buddhist ideal; it came to underlie and sustain the code of the warrior and to leave its mark on all facets of tribal life. For example, during special observances at imperially patronized temples, the hunting and killing of animals might be forbidden for a specified period. A people who lived by hunting were made to acknowledge (although not necessarily to adopt) a higher principle of "taking no life."

When we examine these historical events quite analytically, the incompatibility of Buddhist doctrine with the basic orientations of steppe life would seem to be obvious, but social behavior is seldom governed by detached, rational analysis. The great appeal of Buddhism lay in its accessibility; some measure of its fundamental truth was open to almost any mind, and seeming contradictions between the levels of its truth invited every believer to explore with his own mind the unending vistas of ever-higher truth.

Buddhism enhanced the Liao period's great importance in Inner Asian and East Asian cultural history. The formal study of its scriptures, patronized by the rulers of many states within the orbit of the Liao empire, led to the exchanges of learned monks and of important texts. We read of monks from western Asian regions, from the Xi Xia, from Tibet, from Korea, from Japan, and from China coming to the Liao regions to present sutras for study or to obtain sutras to take back with them. Buddhist monks often served as envoys from one of these countries to others. Buddhism was a world of interstate and intercultural exchange transcending ethnic particularities, using Chinese (at least in its written forms) as its lingua franca, and in that respect paralleling the use of both written and spoken Chinese among the Liao elite. A truly pan-Asian though sinified Buddhism contributed an element of genuine cosmopolitanism to the cultural history of the Liao dynasty.

The principal monuments of Liao Buddhism are religious architecture, sculpture, and painting, tomb art, and the scholarly editing and printing of Buddhist texts. A surprisingly large number of important temple structures dating from Liao times still exist.¹⁴ Their vigorous style represents the late phase of monumental timber frame buildings developed during the Tang dynasty, and they number among the most important examples of historic architecture existing in East Asia today. In addition to these timber halls, twenty or thirty Liao period pagodas (the multistoried towers built of timber or, much more frequently, of masonry, and associated with Buddhist temple complexes) still stand. Many are in a state of near collapse, and many more have collapsed into mounds of rubble, but from them and from the underground treasure rooms over which they were built, scholars have begun to draw large quantities of cultural treasures. In 1970 archaeologists uncovered extensive mural paintings and decorations, a finely sculpted polychromed model of a pagoda, bronze reliquaries, tables and chairs, porcelain objects, items of daily use, mirrors, coins, and carved crystal objects from the rubble

mound and the square underground treasury of a pagoda at Nong'an in Jilin Province (in the Northeast), built in the early eleventh century.¹⁵ The large number of recently discovered wall paintings in such pagoda treasuries and in elaborate underground tomb chambers of the period depict all manner of subjects, very directly illustrating many aspects of Liao daily life. The Liao period witnessed an extraordinary burst of elaborate underground tomb construction for Khitans, for Chinese, and for other members of the elite strata. Dozens of such tombs have been excavated, and tomb inscriptions that have been brought to light significantly correct and supplement the data preserved in the *Liao History*.¹⁶ Unfortunately, these discoveries have not been fully published or studied. Yet the study of Liao social history in the broadest sense has a very bright future as these cultural objects receive systematic study.

The commitment to Buddhism is also seen in the large number and high quality of Buddhist sutra printings undertaken during the Liao period. Individual sutras brought from India and written in Pali or Sanskrit had been translated into Chinese since the third century C.E. By Tang times there was a large accumulation of those translated texts, and of new texts written by Chinese. According to their subject matter, the sutras usually were classified into one of three main categories, called the "three baskets," or "tri pitaka" (in Chinese, "San Zang"). Taken together they were known as the *Da-zang*, or *Great Tripitaka*, one vast collection containing the entire corpus of Buddhist canonical writings. Individual sutras had circulated in handwritten copies and as rubbings from texts engraved on stone. From the late sixth or early seventh century those were supplemented with copies made by the newly invented process of woodblock printing. As the printing techniques developed rapidly in late Tang times, it seemed inevitable that the entire *Tripitaka* would be printed in one uniform edition. That was done for the first time under the patronage of the first Song emperor, beginning in 972 and completed in 983. It included 1,076 sutras in 5,048 *juan* (chapters), and required 130,000 individual printing blocks, each engraved on both sides, from each side of which one double page could be printed. Full sets of that vast work soon reached the Liao court, as well as the Korean court and courts of other neighboring countries.

A number of important sutras were engraved and printed at the Liao Southern Capital (modern Beijing) from the 990s onward. Under patronage of the court, the printing of the entire *Tripitaka* in a Liao edition was commenced at the Southern Capital in the mid-eleventh century and was probably completed about 1075. It included 6,000 chapters and may have been printed with Korean ink on high-quality paper also imported from Korea. The quality of the editing surpasses that of the various Song period printings produced in China, a fact long acknowledged by Chinese Buddhist scholars. Buddhist scholarship was taken more seriously in the Liao empire than it was in Song China, where the intellectual repudiation of Buddhism was then under way.

It was long thought that no portions of the Liao *Tripitaka* had survived, but archaeologists are reported to have found some portions of it in a secret hiding place in a pagoda built in 1056 at Yingxian (Ying-hsien) in Shanxi,

near the Western Capital.¹⁷ Many other important cultural objects also were found there; it is one of the most important archaeological finds of the late twentieth century. (The building and its statues were undergoing repairs in 1974 after having sustained damage in the widespread destruction caused by the so-called Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution of 1966–1976.) The hidden treasures were concealed inside the great Buddha statue in the pagoda. The statue may have been installed a few years after the pagoda was built, but the 160 important objects concealed within it had safely lain there for nine centuries.

The Koreans also obtained copies of the Liao *Tripitaka*. Using that and the Song printing of 972–983, they undertook their own first printing of the entire *Tripitaka* between 1011 and 1082. It was supplemented in about 1101 by a vast compilation of Korean, Liao, and Song Buddhist writings, further demonstrating the importance of the links among East Asian Buddhist believers and scholars in Liao times, when the Liao empire became the crossroads of Inner Asian cultural exchange.

V. INTERPRETATIONS OF LIAO SUCCESS

An important question arises with regard to the civilization of the Liao period: To what extent are the cultural monuments inspired by Buddhism and the other aspects of Liao period culture, such as the distinctive Liao ceramics, to be credited to the Khitans? They created the state and ordered the society within which those things were produced. They allocated resources for their production, patronized their producers, and developed their own appreciation for them. Most important, perhaps, they created an environment in which exchange and interaction were encouraged. But it is difficult to document any Khitan participation in the tasks of designing and creating the buildings, the sculptures, the tomb art, and other artistic endeavors. The monks and lay scholars working on the Buddhist texts, including the craftsmen engraving the printing blocks and applying the technology of printing and binding the books, all appear to have been Chinese or members of the other sedentary communities incorporated by force into the Liao empire. One can go further and say the same about virtually all the other craftsmen, as well as the farmers and merchants, producers of salt and textiles, processed foods, iron and other metals: the creators of wealth in the society were largely concentrated in the sedentary population.

Although styles and modes distinctive to the period and to the region are evident in some of these arts, and particularly in the ceramics, when we identify them as "Liao" are we simply indicating a time and a place, or are we also crediting the skills and the inspiration behind them to the Khitans? The ceramics, which are in many cases adaptations to Khitan uses and tastes, are clearly different from contemporary Five Dynasties and Song ceramics, although in their techniques they are entirely within the scope of Tang and Song ceramics.¹⁸ It is likely that few if any of the potters who made the representative pieces in the very distinctive "Liao style" were Khitans. We know

that the Liao emperors on several occasions specifically ordered that Chinese potters be brought to work in their realm, along with other artisans from China.

Khitan society had developed a limited range of traditional crafts. Khitans were said to be the best saddle makers of the time, and archaeologically recovered examples bear that reputation out. Khitan armorers, cart makers, workers in leather, furriers, and craftsmen producing for other military needs also displayed some specialized skills of a high order. Much Khitan craft production was carried out by women. They sewed skins to make fine boots and clothing, made felt for tents and other uses, and prepared the steppe's distinctive food products. It seems reasonable to assume that a people most famous for its cavalry should have had their own means of supplying and equipping their armed forces. They probably did. Nevertheless, some early documents also suggest that the best of some military items were also made by certain incorporated tribes, especially the closely related Xi tribe. We have no certain answers. Beyond that limited range of traditional tribal craft industries, the civilization's producers and suppliers appear to have been the conquered peoples, not the conquerors.

In general, even by late Liao times the levels of most craft production, including that in the conquered sedentary zone of the Liao state, did not match the levels for the same kinds of activity in Five Dynasties and Song China. Relative to other nomadic societies, the Liao empire was prosperous, in significant part because of the wealth it gained from "tribute" paid to it by China as well as by conquered tribal peoples: its investment in its war machine paid a good rate of return. Measured by the scope and quality of its production activities, however, it was economically backward and remained that way relative to China and to Korea and Japan as well.

Analytically, we can speak of Khitan civilization and Liao civilization. The Khitans created the special conditions that fostered both. Khitan civilization had its special triumphs in building a great empire while preserving the integrity of its own tribal way of life; most of what we mean by "Liao civilization" refers to the period and to the sedentary sector of the Liao empire, not exclusively to the Khitan people themselves.

"Creative Misunderstanding." There are other anomalies in Liao history that are worth exploring. One is the apparent ease with which Liao government was transformed while its traditional tribal structure remained stable throughout the two centuries of the Liao empire. The old Khitan leadership's power, measured by its continuity in decision making and its control over people, was unchanged despite the hybrid government's proliferation of new offices, titles, ranks, and duties. We might think that the Chinese-type institutions superimposed on an at best very slowly changing tribal social base would generate a dysfunctional incongruity between form and reality. Karl A. Wittfogel and Feng Chia-sheng, however, have posed an intriguing explanation: they describe the large-scale borrowing of political forms as "a process of creative misunderstanding."¹⁹ The Khitans, they say, forced the imposition

of alien models on an unreconstructed tribal society without fully understanding the implications inherent in that process. They benefited from the enhanced organizational capacity nonetheless, without knowing that the hybrid forms did not realize the content signified by their foreign names. The resulting forms retained some of the resilience of tribal society while integrating that with the exploitative government imposed over the sedentary populations. They upgraded the continuity and stability of the ruling institutions without feeling the need for resolving all the nonrational features of that juxtaposition.

By never stopping to rationalize all these contradictions, they created an imperfect system that nonetheless served Khitan ruling interests very well: it strengthened their tribal empire without undermining their society's structural integrity. The flawed nature of their borrowing does not decrease the importance of the source from which they borrowed; the Chinese component in their civilization was not less important to them because they comprehended it only imperfectly. The power of the imperial Liao state derived directly from its success in combining the disparate halves of its territories under one integrated government. The imperial clan, strongly identified with the southern interests (the civil governing of sedentary populations), served as the intermediary between those disparate halves of the empire, in the clashes of style and conflicts of interest that were never fully reconciled. By studying the names of those who held the leading northern offices, we can see that the consort clan was identified with northern interests (the administration of tribal and military affairs). That increased the mother-son (that is, the empress-heir) tensions in the imperial household and led to succession conflicts in some cases. Rebellion against emperors came mostly from within the imperial Yelü clan, some of whose members felt themselves excluded from leadership, while the consort Xiao clan's interests were served only by supporting the throne. The integration of those varied interests within one imperial institution may have helped keep them in balance and probably served to strengthen the state most of the time.

The division of the state, for administrative purposes, into the Northern and Southern Chancelleries carried to the logical limit the division of Khitan interests, a bifurcation already apparent before the rise of Abaoji. The Northern Chancellery was given ritual and actual superiority over the Southern. That expressed the reality of Khitan attitudes as well as the preeminence of the military, which drew its manpower from the North. The emperors also recognized that the economic support of war and diplomacy, and the means of intervening in interstate affairs, came from its Southern Region. Moreover, Liao imperial governing became dependent on the services of southerners in all parts of the realm. We can see how "North" and "South" came to have functional as well as regional meanings, and offices for both northern and southern administrators (i.e., for both military and civil governing) came to be established in both the Northern and the Southern Chancelleries. The relevance of the southern bureaucracy grew steadily.

Despite that increasing dependence on "southern" resources, tribal inter-

ests were never overtaken by the growing role of Chinese-style administration. The tribes were the basic administrative units of Khitan society, and their administration was the principal concern of the Northern Chancellery, where any needed expansion of offices and duties borrowed mostly from Uighur and other steppe society models. The continuing predominance in government of steppe interests can be seen in the conduct of the imperial court. Unlike in the case of imperial China, where the bureaucracy steadily grew at the expense of the cloistered imperial clan's governing powers, the active center of Liao government remained the person of the Khitan emperor and his household, his court with attached officials, his guard, and his entourage. All of those elements remained mobile; the emperors preferred their great felt tents to palaces.

Even after building the Supreme Capital in 916-918, the Khitans continued to observe their annual cycle of nomadic activities. That required them to spend many months each year moving from one camp to another in a fixed sequence of times and places. At those places the ruler and his court engaged in hunting and fishing, in military exercises based on the hunt, and in solidifying personal relationships among tribal leaders. The widely scattered camps and the cycle of attendance at them was called the Nabo. That pattern was maintained, with only slight relaxation, to the end of the dynasty. Twice a year, at the summer and winter Nabo, the emperor summoned all the executive heads of his government into assembly at the Nabo sites, not at the capital cities of the realm. These "great conferences," as they came to be called, decided policy, received nominations for offices, and reviewed all the work of government. Chinese and other non-Khitan officials from the sedentary population were not included in deliberations of military matters, a major focus of the winter Nabo, so most of them did not attend. The summer Nabo, by contrast, concentrated on affairs of the sedentary population.

Parallel but somewhat different administrations for the two parts of the dual empire were required by the different emphases and tasks of governing in the two regions. The throne's announcements stressed this repeatedly: "We, taking into consideration the fact that our country comprises the Khitan and the Chinese, therefore administer them separately through the two Divisions of North and South." So began an edict of 1026. That distinction was established by Abaoji. In the 930s and 940s the Southern Division of the empire expanded greatly with the acquisition of the Sixteen Prefectures, and as we have seen, that required the establishment of a "Southern Chancellery" within the Northern Region, while the Southern Region also acquired a "Northern Chancellery."

The *Liao History* explains these in functional terms. It states that in the Northern Region the Northern Chancellery "administered the affairs of camps, tents, tribes, lineages, and tributary states," and "all the Khitan armies and horses were under its control." At the same time, the Southern Chancellery "was in charge of the Chinese population's prefectures and counties, their taxation, and their local militias and horses," and "the selection of civil officials, and taxation" as it applied to both tribes and lineages, "so that all the

Khitan people [too] were under its control."²⁰ From this we can see that the terms "Northern" and "Southern" came to have the force of "military" and "civil" aspects of governing. Because the Southern Region became the richest and most populous part of the empire, governing offices proliferated there. Some posts established in the South had no counterpart in the North; for example, the Bureau of Historiography was considered a "southern" kind of activity, so the Liao empire's historical record was kept in the Chinese language by Chinese officials.

The Khitans constructed a well-balanced combination of Chinese and tribal elements. Their example is worth comparing with the experience of other conquerors. Their system absorbed large segments of Chinese culture and acknowledged their usefulness, but they were not overwhelmed by foreign things. In particular, they appear to have fully accepted a division of labor within their tribal society: the court and some of the elite would become culturally dual (perhaps multiple—it is not certain how this worked on frontiers other than the Chinese), and those persons would function in both spheres in the service of the empire. The vast bulk of the Khitan population, including some of the tribal nobility, would stay in "the reservoir" (to use Owen Lattimore's term and the analysis it implies).²¹ That is, they would remain in the steppe to retain steppe skills and values undiluted by sedentary influences. In that way the social base of the Khitan nation in the main would not be diverted from tribal military life. That remarkable division of labor gave the Khitan state the flexibility it needed in dealing with its dominant neighbor, China. It also allowed it to incorporate sedentary populations into the Liao empire without threatening the purity of the social base from which its military strength was drawn.

A few historians have tried to show that the Liao government encouraged some Khitan tribesmen to give up full-time nomadism and incorporate agricultural pursuits and craft industry into their steppe way of life. Some of the associated tribes may have developed a measure of what may be called a semi-nomadic, semi-agricultural tribal economy, and in some unusual cases Khitan tribesmen appear to have functioned as managers or supervisors for state-sponsored salt works, iron foundries, and the like. These arguments depend on doubtful readings of the relevant texts and remain unconvincing.

The important fact about the Khitans' exposure to sedentary society is their resistance to its attractions and their unaltered commitment to steppe values. The portion of the elite in which the state's needs demanded cultural duality probably remained a minority, and even among such culturally dual Khitans, few were subverted by their Chinese cultural achievement from their loyalty to Khitaness. If that social management tactic was not fully anticipated in Abaoji's conscious planning, it is nonetheless what happened. The early emperors were aware of that development and guided it. Yet such a division of labor could work only if that significant minority portion of the Khitan elite proved capable of developing dual—even multiple—psyches and keeping them in balance. Otherwise they would have been susceptible to a damaging alienation from tribal society and would have lost the acceptance of their own

people; then they would have been unable to deliver the political and military leadership expected of them. We do not see evidence of that. In fact, they managed not to be cast aside as useless persons, fatally separated from their social roots; they could still be Khitans to Khitans, people of the steppe to people of the steppe. In that cultural range and flexibility the Khitan elite were truly impressive, virtually unique among all the Inner Asian peoples in these centuries of Chinese and Inner Asian history.

Khitan society's primary orientation to warfare remained fixed. In that sense the selective borrowings and imperfect adaptations from Chinese culture enhanced the rationality of Khitan nomadism, raising its effectiveness to new levels. There were, of course, unforeseen consequences of such borrowing, but those never led to the social crisis that afflicted the Jurchens in similar circumstances, or to the loss of identity that affected a number of other societies in situations of rapid cultural borrowing. Most important, the Khitans' culturally dual elite obviated the necessity for the state to rely too strongly on its Chinese subjects; nor did they become the victims of subordinates in governing imported from elsewhere, as did the Mongols in China, whose solutions of analogous problems were entirely different from the Khitan pattern.

There is in the Khitan cultural accommodation a patience, a calm balance, a sense of being confidently in control, what one is tempted to call an Apollonian tone,²² a combination of characteristics not seen among other steppe conquerors. Was their cultural policy's one great failure, ironically, not the intended enhancement of the hybrid imperial institution's strength but its political weakness, increasingly evident in the last reigns? And, one may ponder, was it their unintended success in transmitting concepts and tools of enhanced social organization on to others on their periphery that made some of their subject peoples too dangerous for the very survival of the Liao empire? These interpretations of Liao history will be touched upon in Chapter 9, in conjunction with the account of the dynasty's destruction in the early twelfth century. First, however, we must consider other developments in the tenth and eleventh centuries which also contributed centrally to the changing world of China.



CREATING THE SONG DYNASTY

The circumstances under which Zhao Kuangyin in 960 became the founder of the long-lived and venerated Song dynasty contributed much to the structure and tone which Song rule imparted to China's governance. He was, anomalously, an admired usurper who appeared to embody a widely shared sense of purpose. The story of how he came to power is made more understandable by comparing the event with the founding of the Later Zhou dynasty a mere ten years earlier, in 950. The Song dynasty was the direct offshoot of the Zhou, and continued the latter's efforts to reunify the state and overcome China's fragmentation. Accomplishing that internal military task required the creation of a centrally controlled army system that simultaneously faced external pressures: to defend China against the Khitan Liao dynasty to the north while attempting, albeit without success, to recover the lost Sixteen Prefectures. These challenges—to organize, to govern, and to expand—occupied Zhao Kuangyin and his immediate successors through the first decades of Song rule, during which the new dynasty acquired a form and a political style that made it different from what had been known before.

1. THE VIGOR OF THE LATER ZHOU AND THE FOUNDING OF THE SONG

Important trends of change that are apparent from late Tang times onward into the middle of the tenth century (discussed in Chapter 1) culminated during the brief Later Zhou dynasty (951–960), the last of the Five Dynasties. A strong sense of direction and of forward movement toward the military reunification of China was set in motion by the Zhou founder, Guo Wei. When an illness carried him off in 954, his adopted son Guo Rong (originally called Chai Rong), then in his thirties, continued that incipient dynastic enterprise with great vigor and intelligence. He reorganized the sprawling, undisci-

plined military machine inherited from the earlier dynasties, and with it won victories on all fronts. His civil governing also gained people's confidence. He convinced the world that great things would inevitably follow. Then, five years later, Guo Rong too died of an illness, leaving an heir of only six. His world could not accept that the longed-for great achievement would be thwarted by the lack of a mature leader. His young heir was placed on the throne late in the summer of 959, and all his father's civil and military officials swore undying allegiance to him and to his mother, who became the regent empress dowager. Yet in February 960 he was deposed, and his father's principal military assistant, Zhao Kuangyin, was proclaimed the founder of the Song dynasty in much the same way that Guo Wei himself had been propelled into the founding of the Later Zhou dynasty a decade earlier.

Clearly, Zhao Kuangyin was a usurper, although that was not an acceptable thing to say during the long Song dynasty. Nor would many serious people of the time have condemned him for that. It is easy for us now to conclude (as some Chinese historians of succeeding times have insisted) that his actions and intentions in that event were "dishonorable," and were predicated on the self-interest typical of Five Dynasties political behavior. Yet there is much more to the story. By comparing Guo Wei's accession as the founding emperor of the Later Zhou in 951 with Zhao Kuangyin's usurpation of Zhou to become the founding emperor of the Song in 960, we can gain some understanding of the military and political conditions that defined political careers at that time.

Guo Wei Becomes Emperor of the Later Zhou: The Traditional Account

Guo Wei (born in 904) was orphaned at the age of three when his father, a military leader, was killed in battle. The young Guo Wei later turned away from education for a civil career to excel in horsemanship, the martial arts, and the study of books on military strategy. He began to achieve prominence as a military captain under the Later Jin dynasty (936–946). There were many predictions that he was destined to achieve great eminence. When the Liao invasion of 947 terminated the Later Jin, Guo Wei was among those officers who urged Liu Zhiyuan, the Shatuo Turk leader, to establish his own Later Han dynasty (947–950), which Guo then served as an outstanding general in the field against the Khitans. When Liu died in 948, he was succeeded by his eighteen-year-old son, known as the Emperor Yin. He appointed Guo Wei to the highest military offices, including commander of his palace guard, the elite core of his army.

The Emperor Yin's courtiers, however, feared Guo because he was popular among the officer corps. They tried to keep him away from the court, at the Khitan front in the North, and even plotted to have him assassinated. In 950 his wife and family, who had remained behind in the capital at Kaifeng, were murdered while Guo was at the head of an army campaigning to the north. On receiving reports that ambitious courtiers surrounding the young emperor

were maneuvering to take over the state, Guo Wei heeded an appeal to return to the capital in order to restore proper governance and to free the ruler from those "evil influences." That way of stating the case of course puts Guo in the best possible light, but it may not be too far from the truth. Leaving his adopted son Guo Rong in charge of the northern garrison, he led his army back to the south. Approaching the capital, he encountered the "southern army" of his enemies, the forces arrayed to fend off his return. The young Emperor Yin on occasion visited the camp of the southern army outside the capital gates. Guo Wei sought to confer with the emperor in that setting; it is recorded that, failing to make contact, he admonished his forces: "I have come to punish evildoers; I hold no enmity toward the emperor. You must take pains to initiate no aggressive action against him." Yet many of the soldiers in the emperor's camp deserted to join Guo Wei as suggestions that he would make a better ruler began to circulate.¹

On the twenty-second day of the eleventh month (January 2, 951) the young emperor, riding outside the city walls, was threatened by hostile troops under unknown command. Blocked from entering the nearby city gate to evade them, he fled to the west with a small guard, apparently seeking to enter by another gate. The hostile troops pursued. The emperor dismounted at a small village to take refuge in a commoner's house, but the pursuing soldiers swarmed in and killed him. Contradictory rumors immediately implicated Guo Wei, as well as some among the emperor's own courtiers, for having arranged the assassination. The facts remain unclear.

Guo Wei, learning the next day of the emperor's death, is reported to have wailed in grief, blaming himself for having failed to protect his ruler. Then he entered the city and went to his residence, where he closed and guarded his gates, as if determined to remain uninvolved. But disorderly soldiers began to pillage and burn the residences of rich people that night, and on the following morning Guo Wei ordered his soldiers to restore order. The courtier responsible for the murder of Guo Wei's wife and family was captured and executed. When asked about how to deal with that man's family, Guo Wei ordered that they were not to be harmed: "True, he killed my family, but if I were to take revenge by killing his, when would the killing ever cease?" On the twenty-fifth day he called on the empress dowager; they discussed the emperor's burial and reached a decision on which of the late emperor's relatives should be called to the capital to take the throne (though, of course, events moved too quickly for that to happen). The empress dowager, who had long-standing family connections with Guo Wei, trusted him and relied on him for support.

On the first day of the twelfth month (January 11) it was reported that the Khitans had invaded; the empress dowager commanded Guo Wei to lead an army northward to repel the enemy. Less than three weeks later, when his army was camped at Shanzhou² just north of the Yellow River, Guo Wei's troops rioted and forced their way into his presence, demanding that he assume the throne. They declared that they all hated the Liu imperial family and would not tolerate the accession of the designated Liu heir. Some tore

up the army's yellow banners to wrap Guo Wei in the imperial color; others embraced him and shouted, "Ten thousand years to the emperor!" They forced him to lead the army back to the capital.

Five days later (February 3) he was at the outskirts of Kaifeng, the capital. He had previously sent a message to the people of the city saying that order would be maintained and that no one would be harmed; he also had sent a secret message to the empress dowager professing his loyalty to the dynasty and to her personally. The senior civil official of state led the corps of officials out the main gate to welcome Guo and his forces.

Earlier, on the twenty-sixth day of the twelfth month (January 31), the empress dowager had issued a decree naming Guo the regent, but soldiers continued to riot and demand that Guo assume the throne. On the second day of the New Year, the empress dowager issued an edict in which she presented the regalia of imperial office to Guo and asked him to ascend the throne; on the following day (February 11, 951), he proclaimed himself not the new ruler of the Later Han, but the founder of a new dynasty to be called the Great Zhou. The rituals of abdication and of succession by mutual agreement were carried out meticulously. The empress dowager and members of the late emperor's immediate family were guaranteed Guo's protection.

Liu Chong (also called Liu Min), an uncle of the late emperor and a younger brother of Liu Zhiyuan, who commanded the Later Han forces at the base of Shatuo power in northern Shanxi, rejected Guo Wei's usurpation and proclaimed himself the legitimate successor to the Later Han dynasty, calling himself the emperor of the "Northern Han" (in some sources called the "Eastern Han"), and placed himself under the protection of the Khitans.

Zhao Kuangyin Becomes the Founder of the Song Dynasty: The Traditional Account

Zhao Kuangyin was born in 927 in Luoyang, which was then the Later Tang capital. His distinguished family held office for several generations under the Tang, the Later Liang, the Later Tang, and the Later Jin, and his father achieved high military office under the Later Zhou. The surviving record of the young Kuangyin's youth assumes the topos of the emerging hero: he grew up to be a man of imposing bearing and profound judgment; those who knew him recognized that he was no ordinary person. In service under Guo Rong, the second Zhou ruler, he rose to the position of commander of the palace guard, the core of the reorganized Zhou military forces. When Guo Rong's six-year-old son came to the throne in 959, Zhao Kuangyin retained his previous high positions, to which were added new substantial and honorary offices, including Military Governor (*jiedushi*) of Songzhou, in central Henan. He later took the name Song for his dynasty because of its association with this historic Henan locality.³

As the court gathered on New Year's Day 960 (January 31) to offer the expected felicitations to the boy emperor, reports came that the Khitans had invaded and the capital was threatened. The ruler's mother, the empress

dowager, acting as regent for her son, commanded Zhao Kuangyin, as the highest military officer of the realm, to lead a force north to repel the invasion. A preliminary force left the next day, and Zhao at the head of the main armies left on the third day of the new year (February 2). As the army left the city, it is said that people gathered in the streets and whispered that Zhao should be made emperor. It was noted that he had been the head of the Zhou army for six years, had distinguished himself in many campaigns, and had won the full trust of soldiers as well as the civilian population. Fortune-tellers noted auspicious omens.

The first day's march brought the main force to Chen's Bridge post-station, across the Yellow River about ten miles north of the capital. The army officers conferred, declaring that the state was leaderless and it was therefore necessary to elevate General Zhao to the throne in order to preserve the gains that had been made. They conveyed these thoughts to Zhao Kuangyin's younger brother, Zhao Guangyi (who later would become the second emperor of the Song dynasty), and to the leading civil official present, Zhao Pu, no kinsman of Zhao Kuangyin but a trusted adviser who had long served as his personal secretary. Zhao Pu advised against any precipitate action that would lose the confidence of the people, and warned that strict military discipline must be observed. The officers concluded that they would have to force Zhao Kuangyin to ascend the throne; they surrounded his residence to wait out the night.

The next morning they pounded on his doors shouting, "We, your generals, are without a ruler; we therefore wish to name you emperor." Zhao Kuangyin, who had drunk too much the night before and was difficult to arouse, now awoke with a start, but made no response. They forced their way in, swords drawn, and threw an imperial yellow robe over his head. They made deep obeisances, shouted "Ten thousand years!" a greeting reserved for an emperor, and led him to the courtyard, where he was assisted onto his mount. Seeing that he had no alternative, Zhao Kuangyin reined in his horse and made the officers swear to obey him, saying: "You all seek riches and noble ranks and hence raise me to the emperorship; when I issue commands, will you then obey?" They all dismounted, again bowed low, and swore to obey him. Then Zhao spoke: "I have devoted myself in service to the empress dowager and the emperor; the high officials of the court are all my colleagues. You must not commit the slightest violence against the palaces and the court, or against the persons or the properties of the officials. If you obey me, you will be well rewarded; if not, you will be executed." They all responded, "We agree." Thereupon he took charge of the forces and led them back to the capital, and no violence or disorder ensued.

The officers led him into Kaifeng, where he dismissed them and went quietly to his offices. He took off the imperial yellow robes, still hesitant and uncertain what to do. When some officers sent as representatives of the army entered, Zhao, choking with emotion and weeping, said: "I have been the recipient of the Emperor Shizong's [i.e., Guo Rong, the second Zhou emperor] most generous favor, but now, forced by the actions of the armies, it has come to this. It shames me to so violate the norms of heaven and earth; what

should I do?" They could respond only by silently bowing before him. They led him to the main audience hall of the palace, where before the assembled civil and military officials the stately ritual of abdication and succession was performed. One essential element of the ritual, an edict of abdication from the boy emperor, was lacking; but at the last moment a high Zhou courtier drew such a document from his sleeve so that the ritual could proceed. The Zhou imperial family were given noble titles and granted a palace for their residence. So began the new dynasty of Song.⁵

Analysis of the Two Accounts

We need not assume that these accounts, drawn from traditional historiography, are to be fully believed. Chinese historians in post-Song times have not accepted them uncritically. As for the story of Zhao Kuangyin's having been forced to take the step of usurpation, in fact Bi Yuan, the eighteenth-century writer of the general history heavily drawn upon here, undercuts his own account by noting that the *Liao History* provides no evidence for a Liao invasion early in 960, thus making the campaign led by Zhao Kuangyin look like a device for getting the armed forces out of the capital long enough to bring off the coup at a military camp. Yet he does not go so far as to imply that Zhao himself masterminded the entire plot. We should also not assume that ten years earlier Guo Wei had cynically devised an elaborate charade to conceal his imperial ambitions. In both cases, we might best assume that there are elements both of concealed plot and of genuine force of circumstance at work in the process by which these two ambitious, able leaders betrayed their rulers and seized their thrones. Yet if Guo Rong had not died in 959 but had gone on to complete the work of reunifying the country, we can probably assume that Zhao Kuangyin would have gone down in history as no more than the able military assistant at the founding of a long and glorious Zhou dynasty, and the interim period of the Five Dynasties would have known only four dynasties. History, however, is what really happened, not what might have been.

The histories of these two cases display remarkable similarities, and we may surmise that the former event, which developed more slowly and in a less direct fashion, served as the model for the latter, which was carried out with considerably more dispatch and effectiveness. Several of the participants in the former usurpation in 951 were still on the scene and in important positions in 959-960; it is difficult to imagine that they were not aware that they were reenacting the script of their lifetime's greatest drama. In particular, it appears certain that the new emperor's brother, Zhao Guangyi, and secretary, Zhao Pu, both knew about the plot before it was carried out.

In both of the usurpations, the military emergency of an invasion from the Khitan front provided the setting in which unusual action could be taken. In the second case, the invasion was either a false rumor genuinely believed or a contrived element. In 951 Guo Wei left his adopted son Guo Rong, a very able military commander, with a strong force to guard against any real

invasion when he turned back to the capital, while in the 960 case, Zhao Kuangyin and his generals simply abandoned their campaign to the north as if they knew there was no real threat. Both were leaders wholly accepted by the main body of the armed forces; in both cases the rebellious generals' interests lay in enhancing their own careers through their relations with the emperor of their choice. In both cases the public was prepared: rumors about the need to force a usurpation and about the fitness of the commanding general for that role were spread among the people and noted by astrologers. In both cases the "unsuspecting" protagonist was draped in the imperial yellow and forced into an act of treason. In the first case makeshift yellow robes were utilized, but in the second a complete set of prescribed imperial garments just happened to be in the baggage of some member of the military command, even though under the law their possession in itself constituted *prima facie* evidence of treason. In both cases the new emperor counted on a good relationship with and the essential instrumental action of the empress dowager in her role as regent, and played to her in ways that induced her assistance.

In a distinct break with then-current patterns, however, in both cases the ritual aspects of a mutually agreed-upon takeover were carried out in a civilized manner, and the displaced imperial family was treated well. Although neither of these usurpers was a paragon of the humane virtues, the refined process of usurpation that they acted out was not typical of the Five Dynasties era. The Zhou and the Song foundings represent a new way of conducting the imperial enterprise. This heralds a new phase in Chinese history, one foretold by the actions and attitudes of these two men throughout the ambiguous events that brought them to power. In the early decades of the Song dynasty, a more reasoned basis for statecraft emerged. This shift away from violent resolutions of political crises contributed directly to the formation of the "new culture of the Song."⁶

II. ON BEING THE EMPEROR IN TENTH-CENTURY CHINA

The Chinese government, in all dynasties from the Qin in the late third century B.C.E. until the end of the Qing in 1911, was headed by a *huangdi*, a supreme ruler whose title we translate as "emperor."⁷ His roles were many: he was the state's sole legislator, ultimate executive authority, and highest judge. His pronouncements were, quite literally, the law, and he alone was not bound by his own laws. The emperor was ritual head of the state, analogous to the head of every Chinese clan or lineage, by which every person in society was bound to a surname and to family responsibilities. As the head of the imperial clan, he thus was a model for the maintenance of the atomized, family-based ancestor veneration that held priority among all the forms of religion in the society. And the emperor was held to embody and to have responsibility for upholding all the values of the society. But he was not expected to assume such responsibilities in an open, public manner. He did not interact personally with any sector of society, and did not play a significant political role in public life.

There were two kinds of restraints on the Chinese emperor's seemingly boundless authority: those were ideological and practical. Ideologically, China's rulers, some more effectively than others, were constrained by Confucian norms and the values perpetuated by the scholar-official elite of society. In these respects his authority, while enormous, was not unchallengeable, especially in matters of ethics and of principle that were defined by scholarly interpretations of the past. It might indeed take a brave person to challenge an emperor, who, if he insisted, would prevail. Yet there were many throughout history who had the courage to challenge their rulers on grounds of tradition and classical learning, or in matters of ethics. Song dynasty emperors were unusually broadminded in respecting their scholar-official associates in governing, but they too were despots, whether benign or tyrannical, depending on temper and other contingent circumstances.

The practical restraints on imperial behavior were of still more immediate significance. In all of his imperial roles the ruler was in practice limited by the accumulated precedents established by previous imperial actions, especially within his own dynasty. As the head of a vast governmental apparatus ruling over the world's largest society, he was of course forced to delegate his powers to others who conducted the routine operations of government, and it was the pattern of that delegation that constituted the structure of imperial government. Institutions inherited from previous dynasties were the main vehicles through which he delegated political responsibilities. Strong rulers could create new institutions, modify existing ones, or claim to reinstate antique forms at any time, but seldom did those things. Even new dynasties—including those that announced ambitious "new beginnings"—mostly adopted existing patterns. The pressure to make a new beginning⁸ was a useful formula for rejecting the faults of one's immediate predecessors; yet in seeking alternatives to that immediate past, one had no models outside of China to draw upon.

The attractive institutional alternatives were those held to have antique Chinese prototypes. The supreme value of being ancient inhered in them. Nothing could compete in value with or lend more authority to a concept, an institution, or a model of behavior than to claim that it was authentically ancient. The use of names and official titles having evocative associations with ancient models was mostly only a matter of name; borrowing names of offices and titles of office from some revered period in the past could create a validating association with antiquity, but it did not necessarily signify that the substance of historical precedents was being revived.

In reality, Chinese government was continuously evolving, just as Chinese society was continuously changing, though slowly and conservatively. The weight of antiquity notwithstanding, the revered past was something vaguely ideal rather than literally attainable. The best minds in all ages were clearly aware of that.⁹ The best statesmen sought the spirit of the past in governing, not its literal re-creation; the same was true in the arts and literature.

Emperors performed their duties within the framework of a slowly changing political system. They were in fact creatures of a venerable tradition that

prescribed how they should act. Few emperors took strong issue with that fate. Yet within the vast range of their formal duties, they could make some personal choices that reflected their own personalities and interests. An emperor could choose to be a warrior and could lead his armies in the field, or he could delegate that task to others, whether personally chosen by him or perfunctorily approved by him when his councillors made the choices. An emperor could withdraw from all military involvement to devote himself to civil governing and to overseeing the conduct of his court, its staffing, and its debates on policy. An emperor could even withdraw from involvement in day-to-day political affairs, performing in minimal fashion only his ritually prescribed activities and allowing his seal to be applied to all the documents that kept the paperwork of government flowing, while he devoted his energies to private pursuits within his palace precincts. Those pursuits might range from scholarship or art to mindless frivolity, from sex (bountifully at hand) to the search for immortality via Tantrism, drugs, or arcane practices. While the range of an emperor's choices was broad, he was in most cases bound by precedent, by the influences that his Confucian education and his Confucian advisers exerted on him, by the interests of his consort and her clan, by his religious (as opposed to his ritual) mentors, or even by his close personal relationships with the more important among his eunuch attendants. Most Song dynasty emperors were well-educated men who took their responsibilities seriously, but not all possessed genuine ability and high intelligence; succession was guaranteed to eldest sons born to principal consorts, thereby ensuring that most emperors were predictably dull, reliably conformist. As in all dynasties, after the founding generation of the Song, successors were born and reared within the palace precincts, guaranteeing that they would possess quite limited knowledge of the real world, and were seldom eager to enter into it.

Being the Chinese emperor in China was thus quite different from being a Khitan supreme chieftain who took on the perceived modes of a Chinese-type emperor of the Liao dynasty (as we have seen in Chapters 2 through 4). It also was different from being a highly sinicized Jurchen ruler of the Jin dynasty, or a Mongol Great Khan who doubled as emperor of China (as we shall see in subsequent chapters).

The first two rulers of the Song dynasty came of age in the rough-and-tumble political world of the Five Dynasties, and in some measure they brought to their roles as Chinese emperors the mentality of that milieu, mitigated to be sure by their desire to transcend its limitations. They appear to have very quickly assumed the grandiose posturing of a Son of Heaven, and their close associates from their preimperial younger years just as quickly assumed the servile manner of mere humans in the presence of exalted beings. The first two Song rulers, Taizu and Taizong, in their relations with their court officials and military associates are never presented as having been relaxed and at ease in the company of their highly placed associates; neither behaved as *primus inter pares* among his courtiers, as the early emperors of the Tang dynasty are said to have done. A great gulf separating emperor from

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servitor became the predominant feature of later imperial history, and it began to take form in the early Song period.

For whatever reasons, a new etiquette of court behavior came into being. A telling example is found in the histories, where it is reported that early in the year 960, Fan Zhi and two other holdover officials of the Later Zhou were appointed to the high position of Chief Councillor at the court of Song Taizu.¹⁰ The following observation is appended:

The older [pre-Song] system provided that, in considering all major acts of governing with the emperor, the Chief Councillors would always be asked to sit for the discussions, and in an atmosphere of unhurried ease would be offered tea to drink before the meeting concluded. From the Tang through the Five Dynasties this form was always observed. But when Fan Zhi and the others became [Zhao Kuangyin's] Chief Councillors, they were conscious of their all having been courtiers together under the previous Zhou dynasty [when they had been the new emperor's colleagues or superiors]; they felt constrained about how to act and also were overawed by the emperor's overwhelming presence. They therefore requested that they be allowed to prepare brief written summaries of all the matters before them and to submit those in advance as their means of eliciting the emperor's opinions; their request was granted. From this time onward the courtesies of sitting together to discuss matters were abandoned.¹¹

In the mind of the recording historian, the collegiality and easy exchange of views between the ruler and his principal advisers was forever lost, and he regretted that.

This very significant change in the way the government operated at the highest level of decision making does not reflect the imperious demand of a new emperor to be more lordly, but reveals the mutual recognition on the part of both ruler and servitors at the beginning of the Song dynasty that this new ruler's position was particularly tenuous. The emperor's own uncertainty about the personal dimensions of his role made these longtime associates uneasy. They all shared an interest in strengthening the new dynasty; a consequence was the adoption of a new etiquette which elevated the ruler to unprecedented heights. Despite that elevation and the elimination of any easy informality in his relations with his chief ministers, in the light of post-Song history, the Song has always been looked back to as an age in which the tone of the court was one of refinement and restraint. High officials surrounding the ruler always were accorded great formal courtesy; it was widely remarked at the time that not even officials guilty of treasonable conduct were executed. For all the evidence of the Song court's refined style, we nonetheless see here, as in other changes in the central government, the institutional steps leading to a considerably enhanced authoritarianism.

III. GOVERNING CHINA

Deeply imbedded in Chinese political thought from Han times onward is the notion that a legitimate new dynasty should be discontinuous with its prede-